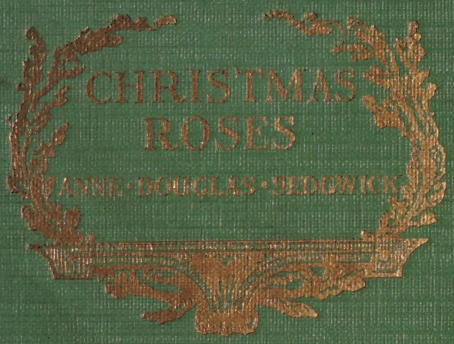
CHRISTMAS
ROSES
JANE·DOUGLAS·YEDOWICK

CHRISTMAS ROSES

By

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK

In beauty of style, in choice of theme, in subtlety of character analysis,—these stories of English life merit beyond anything Mrs. De Sélincourt has ever done the phrase applied by a critic to one of her previous volumes—"a perfection of the story-tellers' art."

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By

Anne Douglas Sedgwick

(*Mrs. Basil de Sélincourt*)

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CHRISTMAS ROSES
AND
OTHER STORIES

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AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ANNE DOUGLAS SEDGWICK
(Mrs. Basil de Sélincourt)
Author of "Tante," "The Third Window," etc.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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CHRISTMAS ROSES

I

HEY were coming up everywhere in their sheltered corner on the wall-border, between the laurustinus and the yew hedge. She had always loved to watch their manner of emerging from the wintry ground: neck first, arched and stubborn; heads bent down as if with held breath and thrusting effort; the pale, bowed, folded flower, when finally it rose, still earthy, still part, as it were, of the cold and dark from which it came; so that to find them, as on this morning, clear, white, triumphant, all open to the wind and snow, was to renew the sense of the miraculous that, more than any other flower, they always gave her. More than any other flower, they seemed to *mean* to come, to will and compass it by the force of their own mysterious life. More than any other flower, winter piled upon their heads, unallured by spring and the promise of sunlight, they seemed to come from the pressure of a gift to bring rather than a life to seek. She thought always, when she saw them, of Christmas bells over snowy fields, in bygone centuries; of the Star in the East, and of the manger at Bethlehem. They were as ancient as that tradition, aus-

tere and immaculate witnesses in an unresponsive world; yet they were young and new, always; always a surprise, and even to her, old as she was, bereft and sorrowful, a reminder that life was forever a thing of births, of gifts, of miracles.

They did not fail her this morning when she came out to them, and she thought, as she stopped to look at them, that one was not really old when, in the shock of sheer happiness, one knew childhood again and its wonder. Yet, as she worked among them, cutting away dead leaves and adjusting sprays of evergreen so that the rains should not splash them with mud, it was a new analogy they brought; and, for the first time, measuring her resource after the appeal Tim's letter had made upon it, she reflected that the Christmas roses were rather like herself. She, too, in this wintry season of her life, was still determined and indomitable. Widowed and childless, with many mournings in her heart, griefs and devastations in her memory, she, too, was a force, silent and patient; and it was this that people still found in her. For the appeal always brought the answer. She had felt herself, so often, benumbed into lethargy, and, yielding to the mere mute instinct of self-preservation, had so often folded herself up and lapsed into the blank darkness of her grief (her husband's death, so many years ago; and Miles's, and little Hugh's, and her dear, dear Peggy's). But it had always been to hear herself, as if in a dream, called to from the outside world, and to feel herself, in answer, coming up again, rising, if only to snows and tempests, in a renewal of life which brought with it, always, a renewal of joy in life.

For months now, since August, she had been

sunken in the last grief — it must be — that could come to her; for Miles was the last, of her own, who had remained — Peggy's youngest boy. The oldest, already a soldier, had been killed in the first months of the war, and, after all his years of peril, it had seemed as if Miles was to escape. But, cruelly, just at the turning of the tide, when victory had become assured, he had been shot down, and in his crashing fall through the air she had felt the end of everything, Peggy dying again with him; for Peggy, too, had died like that, crashing and falling and dragged, in a horrible hunting accident. There seemed, now, nothing more left to suffer, and nothing more to live for, either, unless it were her poor Tim; and it had, exactly, been Tim's letter that had driven her out to wrestle with the elements, after her wont in any disturbance or perplexity, so that she could think over what he told her while she wielded her trowel and fork on the convenient wall-border.

She had, on rising from the breakfast-table, sent Tim a wire: "I shall expect her. Writing later," and had then called to Parton to bring her old warm coat, her hood with its satin lining, and her buckled galoshes.

Parton was accustomed to her mistress's vagaries in regard to gardening, and made no comment on the enterprise except to express the hope that it would not snow again. Parton, in spite of her youth a most efficient combination of parlour-maid and lady's-maid, was devoted to her mistress; the little pat and tweak she gave to the bow of the hood, and the gentleness with which she adjusted the galoshes, expressed a close yet almost reverential relationship.

It was not freezing, and under the light fall of snow the ground was soft. Mrs. Delafield found herself enjoying the morning freshness as she tidied and weeded, and had her usual affectionate eye for the bullfinches nipping away at her plum-buds and the tits and robins at the little table spread with scraps for them near the house; while all the time Tim's letter weighed on her, and the problem it presented; and as she pondered on it, and on Rhoda, her niece, Tim's only child, her firm, square, handsome, old, white face was not devoid of a certain grimness.

Mrs. Delafield was very handsome, perhaps more handsome now than she had been in youth. Her brow, with the peak of thick white hair descending upon it, her thick black eyebrows and her rather thick, projecting nose, were commanding — almost alarmingly so to those who in her presence had cause for alarm. The merely shy were swiftly reassured by something merry in her gaze and by the benevolent grace still lingering on her firm, small lips. She had square eyes clearly drawn, and with an oddity in their mountain-brook colouring, for one was brown and one was freaked with grey. Her form was ample and upright, and in all her gestures there was swiftness and decision.

It was of Tim she thought at first, rather than of Rhoda, the cause of all their distresses. But she was not seeing Tim as he now existed, bleached, after his years of India, invalided, fretted by family cares, plaintive and pitiful. She saw him as a very little boy in their distant Northern nursery of sixty years ago, with bright curls, ruddy cheeks, and the blue eyes, candid and trusting, that he still kept; standing there, bare-armed and bare-legged,

in his stiff, funny little dress of plaid, before the fire-guard, while nurse, irate, benevolent figure, cut bread and butter for breakfast. Dear little Tim! still her younger brother; still turning to her, as he had always done, for counsel or succour in any stress or anxiety. It was nothing new that the anxiety should be about Rhoda; there was nothing, even, that had surprised her in Tim's letter; yet she knew from the sense of urgency and even breathlessness within her that the blow which had been dealt him could not leave her unaffected. She could, after all, still suffer in Tim's suffering. And even before she had let her thoughts dwell decisively on Rhoda, she had found herself thinking, while the grimness settled on her face, "I shall know how to talk to her."

She had always known how to talk to the moody young beauty; that was why Tim had sent off this letter of desperate appeal. She never quite saw why Rhoda had not, from the first, felt in her merely an echo of her father's commonplace conventionality and discounted her as that. Rhoda had never, she felt sure, guessed how far from conventional she was; how much at heart, in spite of a life that had never left appointed paths, she knew herself to be a rebel and a sceptic; no one had ever guessed it. But there had always been between her and Rhoda an intuitive understanding; and that Rhoda from the first had listened and, from the first, had sometimes yielded, proved that she was intelligent.

Mrs. Delafield saw herself so accurately as Rhoda must see her. The terse, old-fashioned aunt in the country residence — yes, dear Fernleigh, square and mid-Victorian, with its name, and

its creepers, its conservatory, and its shrubberies, was so eminently a residence; and she had never wanted to alter it into anything else, for it was so that she had found it when, on her mother-in-law's death, she and the young husband of so many years ago had first gone there to live. Rhoda must see her, her hair so smooth under its cap of snowy net, her black gowns — stuff for morning wear, silk for evening — so invariable, with the frills at neck and wrists, thick gold chains and the dim old brooches that went with them, as belonging almost to an epoch of albums on centre-tables, of Mendelssohn's sacred songs, and archery tournaments; an epoch of morning family-prayers and moral categories, where some people still believed in hell and everybody believed in sin. She did n't think that Rhoda had ever seen through all these alienating appearances to the reality she herself knew to be so different; but it had always been evident that she felt it through them; that she was at ease with her aunt, candid, even if angry, and willing, even when most silent and recalcitrant, to come down to Fernleigh, when her distracted parents could deal with her no longer, and to "think things over," as they put it to her, imploringly.

Mrs. Delafield could see Rhoda thinking things over from a very early age, from the earliest age at which recalcitrancy could count as practically alarming. She could see her walking slowly past this very border at the time that she had determined to go on the stage, — she had only just left the hands of her devastated governesses, — pausing now and then to examine unseeingly a plant, her hands clasped behind her, her dark, gloomy, lovely, young head brooding on the sense of wrong,

and, even more, no doubt, on plots and stratagems. Her aunt had always watched her, while seeming, in the most comfortable manner possible, to give her no attention; noting everything about her, — and everything counted against poor Tim's and Frances's peace of mind, — from the slender, silken ankles to the tall column of the proud young throat; all of it, every bit of Rhoda, so determined by an insatiable vanity, which was the worst of her, and by a sardonic pride, which was the best.

Rhoda, to do her further justice, was even more wonderful in the eyes of her admirers than in her own. Her consciousness was not occupied so much with her own significance as with all the things due to it; and it was upon these things, and the methods of obtaining them, that she brooded as she walked. "Naughty girl," had been her aunt's unexpressed comment; and perhaps one reason why Rhoda had found it comfortable, or, at least, composing, to be with her, was that it was a relief to be seen as a naughty girl rather than as a terrifying portent.

Mrs. Delafield had determined at once that Rhoda should not go on the stage, though not, really, because Tim and Frances had begged her to dissuade the child. She could perfectly imagine having wished to go on the stage herself in her young days; and it was this consciousness, perhaps, that made her so fair to Rhoda's desire. She had taken her stand on no conventional objection; she had not even argued with Rhoda; she had simply been able to make her feel, bit by bit, that she had n't one little atom of talent.

It had been the same thing, really, when Rhoda had announced her intention of marrying a dreadful young man, a bad young man, — Mrs. Dela-

field knew where to apply her categories, — who had a large studio where he gave teas and painted small, disagreeable pictures. They were clever pictures; Mrs. Delafield was aware of this, though Tim and Frances saw them only as disagreeable; and the young man, if bad, was clever. Mrs. Delafield had travelled up to town several times in this emergency, and had even accompanied Rhoda to the studio, where a young lady with bare legs and feet was dancing, with more concentration than spontaneity, before a cigaretted audience. Oddly enough, after this visit, it had been much easier to make Rhoda give up Mr. Austin Dell than it had been to make her give up the stage. Mrs. Delafield had merely talked him over, very mildly, him and his friends, asking here and there a kindly question about one or a slightly perplexed question about another. It had been Rhoda herself who had expressed awareness of the second-rate flavour that had brooded so heavily over dancer and audience, not leaving Mr. Dell himself untouched. On the point of Mr. Dell's income Mrs. Delafield soon felt that Rhoda knew misgivings — misgivings as to her own fitness to be a needy artist's wife. She made no overt recantation, but over her tea, presently, agreed with her aunt that it was a pity to dance with bare feet unless the feet were flawlessly well-shaped. "She is such a little fool, that Miss Matthews!" Rhoda had remarked. And after this there was no more talk of Mr. Dell.

II

When, in the second year of the war, poor Tim and Frances, dusty, jaded, nearly shattered, but ap-

peased at last, were able to announce the engagement of their daughter Rhoda to the unexceptionable Niel Quentyn, Mrs. Delafield's special function seemed ended; but, looking back over her long intercourse with her niece, she knew that Rhoda had felt her a relief rather than an influence; that she had made things easier rather than more difficult to her; that, in short, she had always successfully appealed to the girl's intelligence rather than to what poor Tim and Frances called her better self; and it was of Rhoda's intelligence, and of what possible pressure she might be able to bring to bear upon it, that she thought finally, as she worked at her border and waited for the fly that was to bring Rhoda's baby and its nurse from the station.

She had not been able to rejoice with her brother and his wife over Rhoda's match. She who had measured, during her years of acquaintanceship with her, her niece's force, had measured accurately, in her first glance at him, Niel's insignificance. He was good-looking, good-tempered, and very much in love; but caste, clothes, code, and the emotion of his age and situation summed him up. He had money, too, and could give Rhoda, together with a little handle to her name, the dim, rich, startling drawing-room in which her taste at once expressed itself, and a pleasant country house, where, as he confided to Mrs. Delafield, he hoped to inspire her, when the war was over, with his own ardour for hunting.

Rhoda was far too clever to quarrel with such excellent bread and butter; but what could he give her more? for Rhoda would want more than bread and butter; what food for excitement and adven-

ture could he offer her indolent yet eager mind and her nature, at once so greedy and so fastidious? Mrs. Delafield asked herself the question, even while she watched Rhoda's wonderful white form move up the nave at her splendid, martial wedding; even while poor Frances wept for joy and "The Voice that breathed o'er Eden" surged from the organ; and she feared that Niel was getting far more than he had bargained for and Rhoda far less.

The first year, it was true, passed successfully. Poor Frances, who had, fortunately, died at the end of it, had known no reason for abated rejoicing. She lived long enough to see the baby, little Jane Amoret, as Rhoda persisted in calling the child; and she had welcomed Niel home once on leave — Niel as much infatuated as ever and trying to take an intelligent interest in Picasso. It was since then, during the past year, that Tim's letters had expressed a growing presage and appeal. Moved by the latter, and only a short time before her own grief had overtaken her, she had gone up to London and stayed with him for a few days, and had taken tea with Rhoda.

At Rhoda's it had been exactly as she expected. The drawing-room was worthy of its fame; so worthy that Mrs. Delafield wondered how Niel afforded it — and in war-time, too. Rhoda, as she often announced, was clever at picking up things, and many of the objects with which she had surrounded herself were undoubted trophies of her resource and knowledge. But all the taste and skill in the world did n't give one that air of pervading splendour, as of the setting for a Russian ballet, in which the red lacquer and the Chinese

screens, the blacks and golds and rich, dim whites were, like Rhoda herself, sunken with her customary air of gloomy mirth in the deepest cushions and surpassingly dressed, merged in the soft, unstressed, yet magnificent atmosphere. It was the practical side of matters — the depth of good, dull Niel's purse measured against the depth of Rhoda's atmosphere — that alarmed Mrs. Delafield, rather than Rhoda herself and Rhoda's friends, of whom poor Tim had so distressingly written.

There were many suave and merry young men, mainly in khaki, and various ladies, acute or languorous, who had the air of being as carefully selected as the chairs and china. There were tea and cigarettes, and an abundance of wonderful talk that showed no sign of mitigation on account of her mid-Victorian presence; though, as Mrs. Delafield reflected, musing on the young people about her, no one could say, except their clever selves, how much mitigation there might not be. Like Rhoda, no doubt, they felt her reality through her mid-Victorianism. Her small black bonnet with its velvet strings, and her long, loose jacket trimmed with fringe, would not restrain them beyond a certain point. Yet she suspected that they had a point, and she wondered, though the question did not alarm her, where it could be placed.

They talked, at all events, and she listened; at times she even smiled; and since by no possibility could her smiles be taken as complicities, she was willing that they should be taken as comprehensions. Rhoda's friends, though so young, were chill and arid, and the enthusiasms they allowed themselves had the ring of provocation rather than of ardour. Yet she did not dislike them; they were

none of them like Mr. Dell; and, though so withered by sophistication, they had at moments flashes of an uncanny, almost an ingenuous wisdom.

The occasion had not alarmed her, and she had found but one moment oppressive, that of the appearance — the displayal, as of a Chinese idol, indeed, or a Pekinese spaniel (Rhoda had three of these) — of poor little Jane Amoret. She rarely disliked her niece, even when feeling her most naughty; but she found herself disliking her calculated maternity, with its kisses, embraces and reiterated "darlings." Jane Amoret had eyed her gravely and, as gravely, had held out her arms to her nurse to be taken back when the spectacle was over. Jane Amoret's attire was quite as strange as her mother's drawing-room, and Rhoda had contrived to make her look like a cross between an Aubrey Beardsley and a gorgeous, dressed-up doll Madonna in a Spanish cathedral.

On returning to Tim, Mrs. Delafield found that she could not completely reassure him, but she laid stress, knowing it would be, comparatively, a comfort, on Rhoda's extravagance, eliciting from him a groan of "I know! — I know! — Poor Niel's been writing to me about it! — Dances; dinners; gowns. One would say she had no conscience at all — and at a time like this!" But he went on, "That's nothing, though. That can be managed when Niel gets back — if he ever does, poor fellow! — and can put his foot down on the spot. You did n't see him, then? He was n't there — the young man?"

Tim had never before spoken definitely of a young man.

"The young man?" she questioned. "There

were a dozen of them. Of course, she'll have a special one: that's part of the convention. Rhoda may cultivate — like all the rest of them — every appearance of lawless attachment; but you may be sure, dear Tim, that it's only a pose, a formula, like the painted lips and dyed hair, which does n't in the least mean they are demi-mondaines."

"Painted lips? Dyed hair? Demi-mondaines?" Tim had wanly echoed. "Do you really mean, Isabel, that Rhoda paints and dyes?"

"Not her hair. It's too lovely to be dyed. But her lips, — why, have n't you seen it? — ever since she was eighteen. It is all, as I say, a pose; a formula. They are all afraid of nothing so much as of seeming respectable. I imagine that there's just as much marital virtue at large in the world nowadays as when we were young. — Who is the young man?" she had, nevertheless, ended.

"My dear, don't ask me!" Tim had moaned, blanched and battered in his invalid's chair. (Why would n't he come down and live with her? Why, indeed, except that, since Frances's death, he had felt that he must stand by, in London, and watch over Rhoda.) "I only know what I've heard. Amy has talked and talked. And everybody else is talking, according to her." Amy was Frances's sister, a well-meaning, but disturbing woman, with a large family of well-conducted, well-married, unpainted, and unfashionable daughters. "She is here every day about it. They are always together. He is always there. The poet — the new young poet. He has a heart or a chest or a stomach — something that has sent him home and that keeps him safe at Whitehall, while poor Niel fights in France. Surely, Isabel, you've heard of Christo-

pher Darley? Was n't he there? Young. Younger than Rhoda. Black hair. Big eyes. Silent."

Silent. — Yes, there had been, beside Jane Amoret, one silent person in Rhoda's drawing-room. And she had been aware of him constantly, though, till now, unconsciously. Very young; very pale; aloof, near a window, with an uncalculated aloofness. She reconstructed an impression that became deeper the further she went into it. Thick backward locks that had given his forehead a wind-blown look, and a gaze now and then directed on herself, a gaze grave, withdrawing, yet scrutinizing, too.

"Yes; I think, now that you describe him, I must have seen him," she murmured; while a curious alarm mounted in her, an alarm that none of Rhoda's more characteristic circle had aroused. "He was n't living by a formula of freedom," she reflected. "And he was n't arid." Aloud she said, "He looked a nice young creature, I remember."

"He writes horrible poems, Amy says; blasphemous. There they are. I can't understand them. He casts down everything; has no beliefs of any kind. Nice? I should think that's the last adjective that would describe him."

She had picked up the unobtrusive volume and found herself arrested; not as she had been by the memory of the young man's gaze, nor yet in the manner that Tim's account indicated; but still arrested. Very young — but austere, dignified, and strange, genuinely and effortlessly strange. So a young priest might have written, seeking in close-pressed metaphysical analogies to find expression for spiritual passion. She stood, puzzled and absorbed.

"No, it is n't blasphemous," she said presently.

"And he has beliefs. But surely, Tim dear, surely this young man can't care for Rhoda."

How could a young man who wrote like that about the mystic vision care for Rhoda?

"Not care for Rhoda!" Tim's voice had now the quaintest ring of paternal resentment. "The most beautiful young woman in London! Why, he's head over heels in love with her. And the worst of it is that, from what Amy sees and hears, she cares for him."

"It's curious," Mrs. Delafield said, laying down the book. "I should n't have thought he'd care about beautiful young women."

And now Tim's letter, on this December morning, announced that Rhoda had gone off with Christopher Darley; and Mrs. Delafield could find it in her heart, as she worked and pondered, to wish that her dear Tim had followed Frances before this catastrophe overtook him.

"Good heavens!" she heard herself muttering, "if only she'd been meaner, more cowardly, and stayed and lied — as women of her kind are supposed to do. If only she'd let him die in peace; he can't have many years."

But no: it had been done with *le beau geste*. Tim had known nothing, and poor Niel, home for his first peace leave, had come to him, bewildered and aghast, with the news. He had found a letter waiting for him, sent from the country. Tim copied the letter for her: —

DEAR NIEL:
I'm sure you felt, too, that our life could n't go on. It had become too unsatisfactory for both of us. Luckily we are sensible people nowadays, and such

mistakes can be remedied. You must mend your life as I am mending mine. I am leaving you, with Christopher Darley. I am so sorry if it seems sudden; but I felt it better that we should not meet again.

Yours affectionately

RHODA

"If only the poet had n't had money, too!" Mrs. Delafield had thought. For this fact she had learned about Mr. Darley in London. Rhoda would never have abandoned that drawing-room had she not been secure of another as good.

Tim wrote that nothing could have been manlier, more generous, than Niel's behaviour. He was willing, for the sake of the child, to take Rhoda back, reinstate her, and protect her from the consequences of her act; and what Tim now begged of his sister was that she should see Rhoda, see if, confronting her, she could not induce her to return to her husband. Meanwhile Jane Amoret would be dispatched at once with her nurse to Fernleigh. Tim had written to his child in her retreat, and had implored her to go to her aunt. "I told her that you would receive her, Isabel," so Tim's letter ended; "and I trust you now to save us — as far as we can be saved. Tell her that her husband will forgive, and that I forgive, if she will return. Let her see the child. Let that be your appeal."

Poor, darling Tim! Very mid-Victorian. "Forgive." Would "receive" her. The words had an antediluvian ring. With what battledore and shuttlecock of mirth and repartee they would be sent sailing and spinning in Rhoda's world. All the same, she, who was mid-Victorian in seeming rather than

in reality, would make other appeals, if Rhoda came. Already she could almost count the steady heads of her intentions thrusting up as if through the ground. Even in Rhoda's world repartee and mirth might be displayed rather than acted upon, and Rhoda might find herself, as a result of *le beau geste*, less favourably placed for the creation of another drawing-room than she imagined. That, of course, was the line to take with Rhoda; and as she reflected, carefully now, on what she would say to her, — as she determined that Rhoda should not leave her until she had turned her face firmly homeward, — the sound of wheels came up the road, and outside the high walls she heard the station fly drawing up at her gates. In another moment she was welcoming Jane Amoret and her nurse.

III

She had not seen the child for five months now, and her first glance at her, for all its sweetness, brought something of a shock, revealing as it did how deeply she cared for the little creature. She was not a child-lover, not undiscriminatingly fond of all examples of the undeveloped, though her kind solicitude might have given her that appearance. Children had always affected her, from the cradle, as personalities; and some, like the mature, were lovable and some the reverse. Jane Amoret had already paid her more than one visit — she had been more than willing that Rhoda should find her a convenience in this respect; and she had, from the first, found her lovable. But the five months had brought much more to the mere charm of babyhood. She was now potent and arresting in

her appeal and dignity. She sat in her nurse's arms, her eyes fixed on her great-aunt, and, as Mrs. Delafield held out her hands to her, she unhesitatingly, if unsmilingly, answered, leaning forward to be taken.

She was a pale, delicate baby, her narrow little face framed in straightly cut dark hair, her mournful little lips only tinted with a rosy mauve; and, under long, fine brows, her great eyes were full of meditativeness. Rhoda, though now so richly a brunette, had, as a baby, been ruddy-haired and rosy-cheeked, with eyes of a velvety, submerging darkness. Jane Amoret's grey iris rayed out from the expanded pupil like the corolla of a flower. There was no likeness between the child and her mother. Nor was there anything of Niel's sleepy young countenance, with its air of still waters running shallow.

Mrs. Delafield, something of a student of heredity, saw in the little face an almost uncanny modern replica of her own paternal grandmother, whose pensive gaze, under high-dressed powdered hair, had followed her down the drawing-room in the home of her childhood. In Jane Amoret she recovered the sense of that forgotten romance of her youth — the wonderful, beautiful great-grandmother with the following eyes. Had they not, even then, been asking something of her?

"It is n't every one she'll go to, ma'am," said the nurse, as they went up the path to the house, Mrs. Delafield carrying Jane Amoret.

Nurse was a highly efficient example of her type — crisp, cheerful, a little glib. Mrs. Delafield had never warmly liked her, and felt convinced now, that in spite of her decorous veneer of reticence,

the servants' hall would be enlightened as to the whole story before many hours were over. Well, it could not be helped.

They went up to the big nursery overlooking the walled garden at the back of the house, where, since the morning's post and its announcements, a great fire of logs had been blazing. Nurse made but one respectful, passing reference to Rhoda. The country air would do Lady Quentyn good. She had, nurse thought, over-tired herself of late. What else she thought, Parton and the others were soon to hear hinted. And as Rhoda's calculated maternity had chilled her aunt on that day five months ago, so she was chilled now to think that Rhoda should have had more taste in the choice of her drawing-room than in that of her baby's nurse.

While, in the next room, the unpleasing woman was unpacking her own and Jane Amoret's effects, Mrs. Delafield was left alone with the child. She had found, on a shelf, a box of well-worn blocks, and seating herself in the low, chintz-covered wicker chair beside the fire, she placed them, one by one, before Jane Amoret, who, on her white wool rug, gave them a gentle attention. She had been too young for blocks on her last visit.

The old chair, as Mrs. Delafield moved in it, leaning down, creaked softly, and she remembered, a curious excitement stirring under all these recoveries of the past, that it had been condemned as really too decrepit when Peggy had been a baby. Yet the threat had never been carried out. It had gone on through Peggy's babyhood and through the babyhood of Peggy's children, and, unused for all these years, here it gave forth again just the plaintive yet comfortable sounds which, even

more, it seemed, than another baby's presence, evoked Peggy and her own young maternity.

The chair, the blocks, the firelight playing on the happy walls, with their framed Caldecotts and Cherry Ripes and Bubbles, all evoked that past, filling her with the mingled acquiescence and yearning of old age. And Jane Amoret evoked a past far, far more distant. Peggy had not been like the great-grandmother. None of them had ever reincarnated that vanished loveliness. But here, mysterious and appealing, it was before her; and it seemed to brush across her very heartstrings every time that, from the blocks, the child lifted the meditative grey of her eyes to her great-aunt's face.

Far too mysterious, far too lovely, far too gentle, this frail potentiality, for any uses ever to be made of it by Rhoda, by Niel, or by nurse. And the yearning became a yearning over Jane Amoret.

Yes, there the edifice rose, block by block — her deft, deliberate fingers placed them one after the other, under Jane Amoret's eyes, absorbed in this towering achievement. The miniature Alhambra finished, she sat and gazed, and her little chest lifted in a great sigh of wonder and appeasement. Then, her baby interest dropping, she looked round at the flames, and, for a little time, gazed at them, while her great-aunt's hand moved softly to rest upon her head. It seemed then, as if in answer to the rapt and tender look bent above her, that Jane Amoret's eyes were again raised and that she stretched up her arms to be taken.

"She really loves me," said Mrs. Delafield, as touched and trembling as a young lover. She lifted her, pressing the little body against her breast; and, as Jane Amoret gave herself to the enfolding, a

thought that was as sharp and as sudden as a pang flashed through her great-aunt's mind. "I can never give her up."

What came to her first, as she sat there, Jane Amoret's head leaning against her, was the thought of Christmas roses. It was a gift, a miracle. And to what depths of loneliness the gift had been given; with what depths of life she answered it! But she was breathless while she tried to think, knowing something terrible in her own swift acceptance; seeing for the first time something lawless and perilous in her own nature. Never in her life had she betrayed a trust; never broken a law. Yet often, through the years, she had paused, contemplative and questioning, to gaze at something her mirror showed her, an implication that only she could see, a capacity never realized. And what she saw sometimes, with discomfort and shrinking, in those freaked eyes, those firm lips, was an untamed wildness that had come to her from much further back than a great-grandmother; something predatory and reckless, perhaps from the days of border robbers, and Highland chiefs whose only law was their own will.

She knew now what were the faces waiting to seize upon her accusingly. Not Rhoda's. She swept Rhoda and her forfeited claim aside. Let her stay with her poet, since that was what she had chosen. It was Niel and poor Tim who looked at her aghast. But another face hovered softly and effacingly before them; a pale young face with rosy-mauve lips and following eyes that said, "They will never understand me. This is what I was trying to tell you, always. I knew that I was coming back. This is what I was asking you to do."

It was superstition; it did not deceive her for a moment. Desire dressing itself in a supernatural appeal. Absurd and discreditable. But, in all truth and honour, was n't there something in it? Was n't there a time, once in a blue moon, for lawlessness, when it came as a miracle? Whom would she harm, really? What could his paternity mean, really, to drowsy young Niel? And could she not salve Tim's wounds?

The only thing that could count, — she came to that at last, feeling the child, with sleeping, drooping head and little hands held within her hand, already so profoundly her own, — the only thing was Jane Amoret herself. Had she a right to keep her from what was, perhaps, her chance of the normal, even if the defective, life? Was n't even a bad and foolish mother better than no mother at all, and an untarnished name supremely desirable? She struggled, her eyes fixed on the fire, her hand unconsciously closing fast on the little intertwined hands within it. And with the face of the great-grandmother came again the thought of the Christmas roses, of the gift, the miracle.

She had not sought anything. She had not even chosen. It was rather as if Jane Amoret had chosen her. She need not make an effort to keep the gift. She need merely make no effort to give it back. If Rhoda came (oh, she could but pray that Rhoda would not come!), she need not find the right words for her. She had only to remain the passive spectator of Rhoda's enterprise and not put out a hand to withdraw her from it. And, thrusting, feverishly, final decisions from her, her mind sprang out into far projects and promises. She could, with a will, live for twenty more years yet and fill them full for

Jane Amoret. Niel must not lose his child, evidently. She would arrange with Niel. He had always liked her and turned to her. Let this be his home, and welcome. But of course, he would marry again. She could persuade him not to take Jane Amoret from her to give to a step-mother. Niel would be easy.

And Tim, now, must come, of course. Tim should, with her, enjoy Jane Amoret to the full. What a happy childhood she could make it! It was, to begin with, quite the happiest nursery she knew, this long-empty nursery of hers. In a few years' time Jane Amoret would be old enough to have her own little plot in the garden — Peggy's plot; and a pony like Peggy's should come to the empty stables. She saw already the merry, instructed girl she would choose as Jane Amoret's governess: some one young enough to play out of lesson hours; some one who would teach her to know birds and flowers as well as history and Latin. She would keep Jane Amoret's hair cut like this, — it was the only point in the child's array in which her taste was Rhoda's, — straight across the forehead and straight across the neck, until she was fifteen, and she should wear smocked blue linen for morning and white for afternoon, as her own children had done. With good luck, she might even see Jane Amoret married.

Actually, she was thinking about Jane Amoret's marriage, actually wondering about the nice little eldest boy at the manor, — while her arms tightened in instinctive maternal anxiety around the sleeping baby, — when Parton, doing her best not to look round-eyed, announced Lady Quentyn.

IV

She knew, as she waited for Rhoda to come up, that something she had forgotten during this last half-hour — perhaps it was her conscience — steeled her suddenly to the endurance of a test. Tim had worded it, "Let her see the child. Let that be your appeal." Would it not appease her conscience to stand or fall by that? It should be her appeal. But the only one.

Jane Amoret had waked, and now, dazed but unfretful, suffered herself to be placed again on the rug among the blocks, one of which Mrs. Delafield put into her hands, bidding her build a beautiful big house, as great-aunt had done. The anguish of her own suspense was made manifest to her in the restless gesture with which, after that, and while she waited, she bent to put another log on the fire.

Rhoda's soft, deliberate rustle was outside. In another moment she had entered, and the effect that Mrs. Delafield dreaded seemed produced on the spot; for, arrested at the very threshold, almost before her eyes had sought her aunt's, Rhoda stared down at the child with knotted, with even incredulous brows.

"Oh! He's sent her already, then!" she exclaimed.

What did the stare, the exclamation, portend?

"Yes. He sent her, of course, as soon as he came back."

"But why? — until our interview is over?"

"Why not? She'd been alone for a week." Mrs. Delafield spoke with the mildness which, she determined, should not leave her. "Niel, of course, wanted to have her cared for."

Rhoda, during this little interchange, had remained near the door; but now, perceiving, perhaps, that she had come near to giving herself away, she cleared her brows of their perplexity and moved forward to the fire, where, leaning her velvet elbow on the mantelpiece, she answered, drily laughing; "Oh! Niel's care! He would n't know whether the child were fed on suet-pudding or cold ham! She's not alone, with nurse. There's no one who can take such care of her as nurse. I knew that." And she went on immediately, putting the question of Jane Amoret's presence behind her with decision, "Well, poor Aunt Isabel, what have you to say to me? Father wrote that you would consent to be the go-between. He absolutely implored me to come, and it's to satisfy him I'm here, for I really can't imagine what good it can do."

No; Mrs. Delafield had grasped her own security and her own danger. It had not been in remorse or tenderness that Rhoda's eyes had fixed themselves upon her child, it had been in anxiety, lest Jane Amoret's presence should be the signal of some final verdict against her. She had come because she hoped to be taken back; and if there was all the needed justification in Rhoda's callousness, there was an undreamed-of danger in her expectation.

"Well, we must see," Mrs. Delafield remarked; and already she was measuring the necessities of Rhoda's pride against the urgencies of Rhoda's disenchantment. It was Rhoda's pride that she must hold to. Rhoda, even if she had come, had only come to make her own terms.

"Did you motor over?" she asked. "You are not very far from here, are you?"

No train could have brought her at that hour.

"Twenty miles or so away," said Rhoda. "I was able to hire a motor, a horrible, open affair with torn flaps that let in all the air, so that I'm frozen."

Her loveliness did, indeed, look a little pinched and sharpened, and there was more than the cold drive to account for it. But she was still surpassingly lovely, with the loveliness that, once you were confronted with it, seemed to explain everything that might need explanation. That was Rhoda's strongest card. She left her appearance to speak for her and made no explanations, as now, when, indeed, she had all the air of expecting other people to make them. But her aunt only said, while Jane Amoret, from her rug, kept her grave gaze upon her mother, "Won't you have some hot milk?"

"Thanks, yes, I should be glad of it," said Rhoda. "How lucky you are to have it. We are given only condensed for our coffee at the hotel. It's quite revolting." And after Mrs. Delafield had rung, and since no initiative came from her, she was, in a manner, forced to open the conversation. "Niel has only himself to thank," she said. "He's been making himself too impossible for a long time."

"Really? In what way? Perhaps the hard life over there has affected his temper."

Mrs. Delafield allowed herself the irony. Rhoda, indeed, must expect that special flavour from her.

"Something has certainly affected it," said Rhoda, drawing a chair to the fire and spreading her beautiful hands before it. "I'm quite tired, I confess, — horrid as I'm perfectly aware it sounds

to say it, — of hearing about the hard life. Life's hard enough for all of us just now, heaven knows; and I think they have n't had half a bad time over there, numbers of them — men like Niel, I mean, who've travelled comfortably about the world and never had the least little wound, nor been, ever, in any real danger, as far as I can make out; at least, not since he's had the staff work. It's very different from my poor Christopher, who rotted in the cold and mud until it nearly killed him. There would be some point in his talking of a hard life."

This was all very illuminating, and the bold advance of Christopher won Mrs. Delafield's admiration for its manner; but she passed it over to inquire again, "In what way has Niel been making himself impossible?" The more impossible Rhoda depicted him, the easier to leave her there, shut out by his impossibility.

"Why, his meanness," said Rhoda, her cold, dark eyes, as she turned them upon her aunt, expressing, indeed, quite a righteous depth of reprobation. "For months and months it's been the same wearisome cry. He's written about nothing but economy, fussing, fuming, and preaching. It's so ugly, at his time of life."

"Have you been a little extravagant, perhaps? Everything is so much more costly, is n't it? He may well have been anxious about your future, and the child's."

It was perfectly mild, and the irony Rhoda would expect from her.

"Oh, no he was n't," said Rhoda, now with her gloomy laugh. "He was anxious about his hunting. I don't happen to care for that primitive form of amusement, and Niel does n't happen to care about

anything else; certainly he does n't care about beauty, and that's all I do care about. So in his view, since, precisely, life has become so costly, beauty had to go to the wall and I must n't dress decently or have a decently ordered house. I have n't been in the least extravagant," said Rhoda. "I've known what it is to be cold; I've known what it is to be hungry; it's been, at times, literally impossible to get food and coal in London. Oh, you don't know anything about it, Aunt Isabel, tucked away comfortably down here with logs and milk. And if Niel had had any appreciation of the position and had realized at all that I prefer being hungry to being ill-dressed, he would have turned his mind to cutting down his own extravagances and offered to allow me" — and now, for an instant, if velvet can show sharpness, Mrs. Delafield caught in the sliding velvet eye an evident edge of cogitation, even of calculation — "at least two thousand a year for myself. Money buys absolutely nothing nowadays."

So there it was, and it amounted to an offer. Or, rather, it amounted to saying that it was the sum for which she would be willing to consider any offer of Niel's. Mrs. Delafield, measuring still Rhoda's pride against Rhoda's urgency, mused on her velvet garments, the fur that broadly bordered her skirts, slipped from her shoulders, and framed her hands. Poor Tim had been able to give his daughter only a few hundred a year, and Niel's hunting must indeed have been in danger. Rhoda's pride, she knew, stood, as yet, between herself and any pressure from the urgency; she could safely leave the offer to lie and go on presently to question, "And you'll be better off now?"

Inevitably unsuspecting as she was, Rhoda, all the same, must feel an unexpectedness in her attitude, and at this it was with a full, frank sombreness that she turned her gaze upon her. Anything but a fool she had always been, and she answered, after the moment of gloomy scrutiny, "Don't imagine, please, Aunt Isabel, that because I speak openly of practical matters I left Niel to get a better establishment. I left him because I did n't love him. I was willing to sacrifice anything rather than stay. Because it is a sacrifice. I took the step I've taken under no illusion. We are too uncivilized yet for things to be anything but difficult for a woman who takes the step, and the brave people have to pay for the cowards and hypocrites."

This, somehow, was not at all Rhoda's own note. Mrs. Delafield felt sure she caught an echo of Mr. Darley's ministrations. She was glad that Rhoda should receive them: they would sustain her; and since she was determined — or almost — that Rhoda should stay with Mr. Darley, it was well that she should receive all the sustainment possible.

"It certainly must require great love and great courage," she assented.

Rhoda's eyes still sombrely scrutinized her. "I did n't expect you to see it, I confess, Aunt Isabel."

"Oh, but I do," said Mrs. Delafield.

The milk was now brought and Rhoda began to sip it.

"As for my being better off, since you are kind enough to take an interest in that aspect of my situation," she went back, "Christopher has n't, it's true, as much money as Niel. But our tastes

are the same, so that I shall certainly be very much better off. We shall live in London — after Niel sets me free." And here again she just glanced at her aunt, who bowed assent, murmuring, "Yes; yes; he is quite willing to set you free; at once." — "And until then," Rhoda went on, as if she had n't needed the assurance, — second-rate assurance as, Mrs. Delafield felt sure, she found it, — "and until then I shall stay in the country. Christopher has his post still at the Censor's office, and won't, I'm afraid, get his demobilization for some time. He translates things, you know. So we are going to find a little old house, for me, — we are looking for one now, — and I shall see a few friends there, quite quietly, and Christopher can come up and down, until everything is settled. I think that's the best plan."

Rhoda spoke with a dignity that had even a savour of conscious sweetness, and, as Mrs. Delafield reflected, was running herself very completely into her corner.

There was silence now for a little while. Rhoda finished her milk, and Jane Amoret, gently and unobtrusively moving among her blocks, succeeded, at length, in balancing the last one on her edifice and looked up at her great-aunt for approbation.

"Very good, darling. A beautiful house," said Mrs. Delafield, leaning over her, but with a guarded tenderness. What a serpent she had become! There was Rhoda's jealousy to look out for. She might imagine herself fond of Jane Amoret, if she saw that some one else adored her.

"She's quite used to you already, is n't she?" said Rhoda, watching them. "I wonder what you'll

make of her. She strikes me as rather a dull little thing, though she's certainly very pretty. She's rather like Niel, is n't she? Though she certainly is n't as dull as Niel!" She laughed slightly. "All the same," — and Mrs. Delafield now, in Rhoda's voice, scented the close approach of danger, and was aware, though she did not look up to meet it, that Rhoda's eyes took on a new watchfulness, — "All the same I must consider the poor little thing's future. That is, of course, my one real difficulty."

"Was it? In going away? In having left her, you mean?" Mrs Delafield prayed that her mildness might gloss, to Rhoda's ear, the transition to conscious combat that her instinctive change of tense revealed to her own. "Oh, but you need not do that. Don't let that trouble you for a moment, Rhoda. I will take charge of her — complete charge. I can do it easily. My house is empty, and the child will be a companion to me. I don't find her dull. She is a dear little thing, so good and gentle. You need really have no anxiety."

"Oh, I see." Rhoda was gazing at her earnestly. "Thanks. That's certainly a relief. Though all the same I don't suppose you'd claim that you could replace the child's mother."

"Yes. I think so, Rhoda. A mother who had left her for a lover."

Mrs. Delafield kept her eyes fixed on the fire. Rhoda stood up and leaned her back against the mantelpiece. She could no longer control the manifestations of her impatience and her perplexity.

"That would be your view, of course; and father's; and Niel's. It's not mine. I consider the responsibility to be Niel's."

"Well, whosesoever the responsibility, the deed

is done, is n't it?" Mrs. Delafield observed. "I'm not arraigning you, you know. I'm merely stating the fact. You have left her."

Rhoda's impatience now visibly brushed past these definitions. "You say that Niel is ready to set me free. I took that for granted, of course. It's only common decency. But that's hardly what father could have meant in imploring me to come to — you. He told me nothing — only implored, and lamented. And, since I am here, I'd like some information, I confess."

It was the first step away from pride, and it was a long one. And Mrs. Delafield knew that with it came her own final turning-point. Here, at this moment, she must be true to Tim and Niel, or betray their trust. And here no less — for so it seemed to her — she might, in betraying them, take the law into her own hands and promise herself, and them, that, in breaking it, she would make something better. Yet she did not feel these alternatives, now, at war within her mind. She knew that they were there, implicit, but she knew them already answered. Rhoda had answered for her; and Jane Amoret had answered. It took her, however, a moment to find her own answer, the verbal one, and while she looked for it, she kept her eyes on the fire.

"Your father wants you to go back," she said at last. "Niel is willing to take you back. That is the information I had for you. Not for a moment because he would accept your interpretation of responsibility, and not for a moment because of any personal feeling for you; which must be a relief to you. Merely for your sake, and the child's. But I don't know how to plead such a cause with

you, Rhoda. I understand you, I think, better than your father does. I've always seen your point of view as he could never see it, and I see it even now. So that I should feel that I asked you something outrageous in asking you to go back to your husband when you love another man. If you should want to go back, that would be a very different matter — if, by chance, you feel you've made a mistake and are tired, already, of Mr. Darley."

She had time, in the pause that followed, the scales pulsing almost evenly — it was as if she saw them — between Rhoda's pride and Rhoda's urgency, to wonder at herself. And most of all to wonder that she regretted nothing. She kept her eyes on the fire, but she knew that Rhoda, very still, scrutinized her intently. The sharply drawn tension of the moment had resolved itself, to her imagination, into a series of tiny ticks, as if of the scales settling down to the choice, before Rhoda spoke. Then what she found to say was, "That's hardly likely, is it?"

"I felt it impossible, you will be glad to hear," said Mrs. Delafield. "No one who understands you could suspect you, whatever your faults, of two infidelities in the space of a fortnight."

And now again there was a long silence, broken only by the lapping of the flames up the chimney and the soft movements of Jane Amoret among her blocks.

Rhoda turned away at last, facing the fire and looking down at it, her hands on the edge of the mantelpiece, her foot on the fender; and she presently lifted the foot and dealt the logs a kick.

It was all clear to Mrs. Delafield. She was tired of her poet, or, at all events, did not, in the new life,

find compensations enough. She had come, hoping to have her way made clear for a reëntry, dignified, if not triumphant, into the old life. And here she was, in her corner, her head fairly fixed to the wall.

Meanwhile, what had become of the mid-Victorian conscience? What had, indeed, become of any conscience at all, since she continued to regret nothing? She even found excuses, perfidious, no doubt, yet satisfactory. It had been the truth she had given Rhoda — the real truth, her own, if not the truth she owed her, not the truth as Tim and Niel had placed it, all confidently, in her hands. But since it was preëminently not the truth that Rhoda had come to seize, she was willing, now that she had fixed her so firmly, to give her something else, and she really rejoiced to find it ready, going on presently and with a note of relief that Rhoda's ear could not fail to catch: —

"Not only from the point of view of dignity one could n't suspect it of you, Rhoda, but — I want to say it to you, having had my glimpse of Mr. Darley — from the point of view of taste. If you were going to do anything of this sort, — and I don't need to tell you how deeply I deplore it nor how wrong I think you, — but if you were going to do it, you could n't have chosen better. He is gifted; he is charming; he is good. I saw it all at once."

There was her further truth, and really it was due to Rhoda. Rhoda, at this, faced her again and, highly civilized creature that she was, it was with her genuine grim mirth.

"Upon my word, Aunt Isabel!" she commented. "You are astonishing."

"Am I? Why?" asked Mrs. Delafield, though she knew quite well.

"Why, my dear? Because you are over sixty years old and you wear caps. I expected to find dismay, reproach, and lamentations — all the strains of poor old father's harmonium; to have you down on your knees begging me to return to the paths of virtue. And here you are, cool and unperturbed and, positively, patting us on the back; positively giving us your blessing. Well, well, wonders will never cease! Yes, he *is* charming, no one can deny that; and good and gifted, too. But to think of your having spotted it so quickly! Why, you only saw him once, if I remember, and I don't remember that you talked at all."

"We did n't. I only saw him once."

"And it was enough! To make you understand! To make you condone! — Come, out with it, Aunt Isabel, you wicked old lady! I see now why I've always got on so well with you. You *are* wicked."

"To make me understand. I won't say condone."

"You need n't say it. You've said enough. And certainly it is a feather in Christopher's cap. But he is the sort of person one falls in love with at first sight."

"So I see."

"And so do I," said Rhoda, still laughing. But her slightly avenging gaiety dropped from her after the last sally, and turning again to the fire, and again kicking her log, she said, almost sombrely, "He absolutely worships me."

Was not this everybody's justification? Mrs. Delafield seized it, rising, as on a satisfying close.

"Will you stay to lunch?" she asked.

"Dear me, no!" Rhoda laughed. "I must get back to Christopher. And the motor is there wait-

ing. So you'll write to father and tell him that I came here and that you advised me to stick to Christopher."

"Advised? Have I seemed to advise, Rhoda? Do you mean" — it was, Mrs. Delafield knew, the final peril — "that you had considered not sticking to him?"

Rhoda continued to laugh a little, drawing up her furs.

"Rather not! It could n't have entered my head, could it, either from the point of view of dignity or of taste — as you've been telling me? You have been very wonderful, you know! Tell father, then, if you like, that you gave us your blessing."

"I'll tell him," said Mrs. Delafield, "that I'm convinced you ought not to go back to Niel."

"I see," — Rhoda nodded, and their eyes sounded each other, curiously, — "though father thinks I ought."

"Of course. That's why you're here."

"Father would have gone down on his knees to beg me."

"Yes. Down on his knees. Poor Tim!"

She was horribly frightened, but she faced Rhoda's grim mirth deliberate with gravity. And Rhoda, whatever she might have seen or guessed, accepted her defeat; accepted the dignity and taste thrust upon her.

"Father, in other words, is n't a wicked old gentleman as you are a wicked old lady. I see it all, and it's all a feather in Christopher's cap. Well, Aunt Isabel, good-bye. Shall I see you again? Will you come and call when I'm Mrs. Darley? I don't see how, with a clear conscience, you can chuck us, you know."

"Nor do I," Mrs. Delafield conceded, after only a pause. "I don't often go to London, but, when I do, I shall look in upon you, if you want me to."

"Rather!" Rhoda, now gloved and muffled, had fallen back on her normal rich economy of speech. "You'll be useful as well as pleasant. And Christopher will adore you, I'm sure. I'll tell him that you think him charming."

"Do," said Mrs. Delafield, following her to the door.

She had forgotten even to kiss Jane Amoret good-bye.

V

Still Mrs. Delafield knew no remorse. Rather, a wine-like elation filled her. She thought of her state of consciousness in terms of wine, and ordered up from her modest cellar a special old port, hardly tasted since her husband's death, and, all alone, drank at lunch a little glass in honour of Jane Amoret's advent. Also, though elated, she was conscious of needing a stimulant. The scene with Rhoda had cost her more than could, at the moment, be quite computed.

What it had won for her she was able to compute when, after lunch, she went upstairs to look at Jane Amoret asleep in her white cot. She did not feel like a robber brooding in guilty joy over ill-gotten booty. She could not feel herself that, nor Jane Amoret booty. Jane Amoret was treasure, pure heaven-sent treasure, her flower of miracle. Christmas roses had been in her mind since morning, and the darkness, the whiteness of the child, as well as her beautiful unexpectedness, made her think of them anew; her gravity, too; something of melan-

choly that the flowers embodied; for they were not smiling flowers — gazing rather at the wintry sky in earnest meditation.

Jane Amoret's black lashes lay upon her cheek, ever so slightly turned up at the tips, and her great-aunt, leaning over her, felt herself doting upon them and upon the little softly breathing profile embedded in the pillow, a bud-like, folded hand beside it.

"Little darling, we will make each other happy," she whispered.

Rhoda had passed from their lives like a storm-cloud.

Jane Amoret was still sleeping, and she had gone downstairs to the little morning-room where, since the war, she had really lived, to settle with herself what she must say to Tim, when there came a ringing at the front-door bell. The morning-room, at the back of the house, like the nursery, overlooked the southern lawn and the walls of the kitchen-garden; but she could usually hear if a motor drove up, and, in her still concentration upon the empty sheet lying before her on the desk, she was aware that there had been no sound. It was too early for a visitor, too early for the post, and she looked up with some curiosity as Parton came in.

"It's a gentleman, ma'am, to see you," said Parton; and her young, trained visage showed signs of a discomfiture deeper than that Rhoda's coming had evoked. "Mr. Darley, ma'am; and he hopes very much you are disengaged."

Mrs. Delafield had, as a first sensation, that of sympathy with Parton. Parton evidently knew all about it and was evidently in distress lest her face

betrayed her knowledge. In her effort to maintain her own standards of impassivity she suddenly blushed crimson, and Mrs. Delafield then felt that she was very old and Parton very young, and that in that fact alone was a bond, even if there had been no other. She had many bonds with Parton, and now, seeing her so soft, uncertain, and dismayed, she would have liked to pat her on the shoulder and say, "There, my dear, it does n't make any difference. I assure you I'm not disturbed." And since she could not say it, she looked it, replying with the utmost equability, "Mr. Darley? By all means. Show him in at once, Parton."

There was, after Parton had gone, a short interval, while Mr. Darley doubtless was taking off his coat, and during which she felt herself mainly engaged in maintaining her equability. But, after her encounter with Rhoda, was n't she equable enough for any situation? Besides, Mr. Darley could in no fashion menace Jane Amoret, and under all her conjectures and amazements there lay a certain satisfaction. She knew, from her encounter with Parton, that she was interested in all young creatures when they were nice, and she was not sorry to have another look at Mr. Darley.

When he entered and she saw him, — not in khaki as that first time, but in a gray tweed suit, — when Parton had softly and securely closed the door and left them together, she found herself borne along on a curious deepening of the current of sympathy for mere youth. She had not remembered how young he was; she had not had that as her dominant impression at Rhoda's tea, as she had it now. He must be several years younger than Rhoda; hardly more than twenty-two or three,

she thought; and it must have been as a mere child that the war had swept him out into maturing initiations. Something of an experience, shattering yet solidifying, was in his face, fragile, wasted, yet more final and finished than one would have expected at his time of life; and also, in curious contrast to his boyish, beardless look, a deep line was engraved across his forehead; whether by suffering or by the trick she soon discovered in him of raising his eyebrows in an effort of intense concentration, she could not tell.

She gave him her hand simply, and said, "Do sit down."

But Mr. Darley, though he looked at the chair she indicated, did not take it. He remained standing on the hearthrug, facing the windows, his hands clasped behind him, and she then became aware that he was enduring a veritable agony of shyness. It did not take the form of blushes, — though his was a girlish skin that would display them instantly, — or of awkward gestures or faltering speech. It was a shyness wild, still, and bereft of all appeal, like that of a bird, — the simile came sharply to her, — a bird that had followed some swift impulse and that now, caught in a sudden hand, relapsed into utter immobility. His large eyes were on hers — fixed. His expression was like a throbbing heart. She knew that all she wanted, for the moment, was to show him that the hand was gentle.

"I'm afraid you came hoping to find Rhoda," she said, looking away from him and giving her chair, as a pretext, sundry little adjustments before drawing it to the fire. "But she left this morning, after seeing me, and you must have

crossed her on the road. At least — have you motored?"

The large eyes, she found, were still fixed on her as, with the question, she glanced up at him; but he answered immediately — rather as if with a croaking cry from the blackbird when one pressed it, —

"No; I came by train. I left a little after Rhoda did."

"By train?" she marvelled kindly. "But we are four miles from the station here. Are n't you, at your end, as far? And such roads!" She saw now that his boots and upturned trousers were, indeed, deeply mired.

"Oh — I did n't mind the walk," said Mr. Darley. "It was n't far."

She was sure he had n't found it far. His whole demeanour expressed the overmastering impulse that had, till then, sustained him.

"Have you had any lunch?" she went on. "I can't think where you can have lunched. There's nothing at the station. Do let me send for something. I've only just finished."

It seemed strangely indicated that she should, to-day, feed Rhoda and her lover.

But the caught blackbird was in no state for feeding. More wildly, yet more faintly than before he gave forth the croaking cry with, "Oh, no. Thanks so much. Yes. At our station. I found something at our station. Sandwiches; no, a bun. I had a cup of Bovril."

And now, curiously, poignantly to her, he began to blush as though suddenly and overwhelmingly aware of himself and of how idiotically he must be behaving. Poor child! How young he was! And

how ill he had been in the trenches; and how beautiful it was to remember — as she did suddenly, and not irrelevantly, she knew, though she could not trace the relevance — that, in the little volume, written since his return, there had not been a shadow of the ugly rancour, revengeful and provocative, one met in some other soldier-poets whom one might have fancied to be of his kind. For how he must have hated it! And, at the same time, — memory brought back a line, a stanza here and there, from her snatched reading — how holy he had found it; seeing so much more than error, death, and suffering.

Her eyes dwelt on him with something beyond the kindly wish to spare him as she said, "Please sit down. You must be very tired and you are not strong, Rhoda told me. Don't be afraid of me. I am an old lady who can listen to anything and, I think, understand a great deal. I've already heard a great deal from Rhoda. I'm anything but unfriendly to you, I assure you."

It was — she was aware of it when it had crossed her lips — a curious thing to say to her niece's lover, to the man who had destroyed Tim's happiness and wrecked Niel's home; but it was too true not to be said. And she was perfectly sure now that it was not Mr. Darley who had wrecked and destroyed. It was Rhoda who had taken him, of course; not he Rhoda. He would never take anybody. He would stand and gaze at them as he now gazed at her, and only when they threw out appealing arms would he move towards them. Rhoda had thrown out appealing arms — after she discovered that alluring arms had no effect. Mrs. Delafield's impressions and intuitions tumbled

forth in positive clusters as she took in her companion. Allurements, Russian-ballet back-grounds, snowy throats and velvet eyes, would have no effect upon him at all; he cared as little about them at one end of the scale of sensations as about rats and corpses at the other. He would not even see them. It was something else he had seen in Rhoda; something she had found herself driven to display. And if she were getting tired of him already, it was simply because, having trapped him with the artifice, she now found herself shut up with him in a cage, which, while it was of her own making, was extremely uncongenial to her.

Mr. Darley was far too absorbed in what she had just said to him to think of taking the chair. It had helped him incalculably — that was quite apparent; for though the blush stayed, and though he was still wild and shy, they had already, indubitably, begun to understand each other.

"Do you mean," he asked, "not unfriendly to me or not unfriendly to Rhoda?"

This was an unexpected question, and for a moment, not knowing what it portended, she hardly knew how to meet it. But the understanding that seemed to deepen with every moment made truth the most essential thing, and she replied after only a hesitation, "To you."

Mr. Darley looked all his astonishment. "But why? Do you feel that you like me, too? Because, of course, I've never forgotten you. That's why I felt it possible to come to-day."

And since truth was essential, it was she, now, who looked, with her surprise, something that she felt to be a recognition, as she replied, "I suppose it must be that. I suppose we liked each other at

first sight. I certainly did n't know the feeling was reciprocal."

"Nor did I!" Mr. Darley exclaimed. He took the chair at the other end of the hearthrug, facing her, his knees crossed, his arms clutched tightly across his chest; and now he was able to reach his journey's goal. As all, on Rhoda's side, had been made clear to her that morning, so on his, all was clear, as he said, with a solemnity so young, so genuine that it almost brought tears to her eyes, "Then since you do like me, please don't let her leave me!"

The situation was before her, definite and overpowering; but how it could have come about remained veiled like the misty approaches to a mountain.

"Does Rhoda want to leave you?" she questioned.

"Why — did n't you know?" Mr. Darley's face flashed with a sort of stupor. "Did n't she come for that?"

"You answer my questions first," Mrs. Delafield said after a moment.

He was obedient and full of trust. "It's because of the child, you know, that lovely little creature in London. From the first — you can't think how long ago it already seems, though we have hardly been a week together — I've seen it growing, that feeling in her that she could n't bear it. Other things, too; but that more than all. At least," he was truthful to the last point of scruple, "I think so. And though she did not tell me that she was saying good-bye this morning, I knew — I knew — that she was coming to you because she wanted her child, and would accept anything, endure anything, to be with it again."

"What do you think Rhoda had to endure?" Mrs. Delafield inquired.

"Oh — you can't ask me that! I saw you in it and you saw me!" Mr. Darley exclaimed. "You *will* be straight with me? You saw that soulless life of hers, with that selfish figurehead of a husband for all guide. She was suffocating in it. She did n't need to tell me. I saw it in her face before she told me. How can a woman live with a man she does n't love? When you said not unfriendly to me, did you mean to make a difference? Did you mean that you don't care for Rhoda? Yet she's always loved and trusted you, she told me, more than any one. You were the one reality she clung to. That's why *she* could come to you today."

"What I mean is that I'm on your side, not on Rhoda's," said Mrs. Delafield, and at the moment her charming old white face expressed, perhaps as never before in her life, the quality of decisiveness. "I am on your side. But I have to see what that is."

He was feeling her face even more than her words. He was gazing at her with a rapt scrutiny which, she reflected, exonerating Rhoda to that extent, would make it difficult for a woman receiving such a tribute not to wish to retain it permanently. It enriched and sustained one and — although it was strange that she should feel this — troubled and moved one, too. A sense of pain stirred in her, and of wonder about herself and her fitness to receive such gazes. One really could n't, at sixty-three, have growing pains; yet Mr. Darley's gaze filled her with that troubled consciousness of expanding life. He wanted Rhoda. She

wanted Jane Amoret. So, was n't it all right? Was n't she all right? His side was her side. They wanted the same thing. But the troubled sap of the new consciousness was rising in her.

"My side is really Rhoda's side," said Mr. Darley, as if answering her thought. He held his knee in gripped hands and spoke with rapid security. He was still shy, but he now knew exactly what he wished to say, and how to say it. "It's Rhoda's side, if only she'd see it. That's why I was not disloyal in asking my question when you said you were n't unfriendly. Really — really — you *will* believe me — it's for her, too. I would n't have let her come with me if it had n't been. I'm not so selfish as I seem. I know it's dreadful about the child. But — this is my secret; Rhoda does not guess it and I could never tell her — she does n't love the child as she thinks she does. Not really. In spite of her longing. She longs to love it, of course; but she is n't a mother; not to that child. That's another reason. It was all false. The whole thing. The whole of her life. The real truth is," said Christopher Darley, gazing large-eyed at her, "that Rhoda is frightened and wants to go back. She's not as brave as she thought she was. Not quite as brave as I thought. But if she yields to her fear and leaves me, — she has n't yet, I know, I see that in your face, — but if she goes back to her old life, it will mean dust, humiliation, imprisonment forever."

"That's what I told her," Mrs. Delafield said, her eyes on his.

"I knew! I knew!" cried the young man. "I knew you'd done something beautiful for me — for us. Because you see the truth. And you were

able to succeed where I failed! You were able to convince her! You've saved us both! Oh, how I thank you!"

"It was n't quite like that," said Mrs. Delafield. "It was n't to save either of you. I don't think it right for a woman to leave her husband with another man because she has ceased to love her husband. But I made her go back. I would n't even let her tell me that she wanted to leave you. I did n't convince her. I merely made it impossible for her. She left me reluctant and bewildered. You have n't found out yet," — Mrs. Delafield leaned forward and picked up the little poker; the fire needed no poking and the movement expressed only her inner restlessness, — "you have n't found out that Rhoda, at all events, *is* very selfish?"

Christopher Darley at that stopped short. "Oh, yes, I have," he answered then; but the frightened croak was in his voice as he said it.

"And have you found out, too," said Mrs. Delafield, eyeing her poker, sparing him, giving him time, "that she's unscrupulous and cold-hearted? Do you see the sort of life she'll make for you, if she is faithful to you and stays with you, not because she's faithful, not because she wants to stay, but gagged and baulked by me? Have n't you already — yourself, been a little frightened sometimes?" she finished.

She kept her eyes on her poker and gave Mr. Darley his time, and indeed he needed it.

"If you've been so wonderful," he said at last, with the slow care of one who threads his way among swords; "if, though you think we're law-breakers, you think, too, that we've made ourselves another law and are bound to stand by it; if you've

sent her back to me — why do you ask me that? But no," he went on, "I'm not frightened. You see — I love her."

"She does n't love you," said Mrs. Delafield.

"She will! She will!" — It made Mrs. Delafield think of the shaking heart-throbs of the blackbird. — "All that you see, — yes, yes, I won't pretend to you, because I trust you as I've never before trusted any human being, because you are truer than any one I've ever met, — it's all true. She is all that. But don't you see further? Don't you see it's the life? She's never known anything else. She's never had a chance."

"She's known me. She's had me."

Mrs. Delafield's eyes did not leave the poker. But under the quiet statement the struggle in her reached its bitter close. She had lost Jane Amoret. She must give her up. Not for her sake; nor for Rhoda's, — oh, in no sense for Rhoda's, — but for his. She could not let him pay the price. She must save him from Rhoda.

"What do you mean?" he asked; and it was as if crumbling before her secure strength, almost with tears.

"I mean that you'll never make anything different of her. I never have, and I've known her since she was born. You won't make her, and she'll unmake you. She is disintegrating. She has always been like that. Nothing has spoiled her. From the first she's been selfish and untender. I don't mean to say that she has n't good points. She has a sense of humour; and she's honest with herself: she knows what she wants and why she wants it — although she may take care that you don't. She is n't petty or spiteful or revengeful. No," — Mrs. Delafield

moved her poker slowly up and down as she carved it out for him, and it seemed to be into her own heart she was cutting, — "there is a largeness and a dignity about Rhoda. But she feels no beauty and no tragedy in life, only irony and opportunity. You'll no more change her than you'll change a flower, a fish, or a stone."

Holding his knee in the strained grasp, Christopher Darley kept his eyes on her, breathing quickly.

"Why did she come with me, then?" he asked, after the silence between them had grown long. (Strange, she thought, so near they were, that he could not know her heart was breaking, too. All the time it was Jane Amoret's sleeping eyelashes she saw.) "Why did she love me? I am not irony or opportunity."

"Do you think she ever loved you?" said Mrs. Delafield. "Was it not only that she wanted you to love her? Was n't it because you were different, and difficult, and new? I think so. I think you found her at a bored, antagonistic moment; money-quarrels with her husband, — he is a good young fellow, Niel, and he used to worship her, — the war over and life to take up again on terms already stale. She is calculating; but she is adventurous and reckless, too. So she went. And of course she was in love with you then. That goes without saying, and you 'll know what I mean by it. But Rhoda gets through things quickly. She has no soil in her in which roots can grow; perhaps that's what I mean by saying she can't change. One can't, if one can't grow roots. But now you are no longer new or difficult. You are easy and old — already old; and she's tired of you. You bore her. You

constrain and baffle her — if she's to keep up appearances with you at all; and she'd like to do that, because she admires you exceedingly. So she wants to go back to Niel. I know," said Mrs. Delafield, slightly shaking her poker, "that if I'd given her a loophole this morning, she'd be on her way to London now."

"And why did n't you?" asked Christopher Darley.

Ah, why? Again she brooded over the softly breathing little profile, again met the upward gaze of Jane Amoret's grey eyes. Well might he ask why. But there was the one truth she could not give him. There was another that she could, and she had it ready. "I had n't seen you," she said.

"You thought it right for her to come back to me, until you saw me?"

"I thought it beneath her dignity — as I said to her — to be unfaithful to two men within a fortnight."

"But why should you care for her dignity?" Mr. Darley strangely pressed. "Why should n't you care more for your brother's dignity, and her husband's, and her child's — all the things she said you'd care for?"

He had brought her eyes to his now, and, for the first time since they met, it was he who had the advantage. Frowning, yet clear, he bent his great young eyes upon her and she knew, dismayingly, that her thoughts were scattered.

"I have always cared for Rhoda." She seized the first one.

"Is it a future for Rhoda to disintegrate the life of the man who loves her and to get no good of him? Is n't it better for a woman like Rhoda to go back

to the apparent dignity, since she has no feeling for the real? Is n't that what you would have felt, if you'd been feeling for Rhoda? It was n't because you felt for her," said Christopher Darley. "You had some other reason. You are keeping another reason from me. You know," he urged upon her with a strange, still austerity, "you know you can't do that. You know we must say the truth to each other. You know that we simply belong to each other, you and I."

"My dear Mr. Darley — my dear young man!"

She was, indeed, bereft of all resource. She laid down her poker and, as she did so, felt herself disarming before him. His eyes, following her retreat, challenged her, almost with fierceness.

"I know — I know that you are giving up something because of me," he said. "You want her to go back to her husband now, so that I may be free. It was n't of me you thought this morning; nor of your brother, nor of Rhoda. Everything changed for you after you saw me. What is it? What is it that made you send Rhoda back to me and that makes you now want to free me? You are beautiful — but you are terrible. You do beautiful and terrible things. And you must let me share. You must let me decide, too, if you do them for me!"

He had started up, but not to come nearer in his appeal and his demand. Cut to the heart as he was, — for she knew how she had pierced, — it was rather the probing of some more intolerable pain that moved him. And looking down at her with eyes intolerant of her mercy, he embodied to her her sense of a new life and a new conscience. Absurd though his words might seem, they were true. Though never, perhaps, again to meet, she and

Christopher Darley recognized in each other some final affinity and owed each other final truth.

She no longer felt old and wise, but young and helpless before the compulsion of the kindred soul. She owed him the truth, and in giving it she must risk his freedom and his happiness. Looking up at him, that sense of compulsion upon her, she said, "It was because of Jane Amoret. It was because I loved her and wanted to keep her."

Christopher Darley grew paler than before. "She is here?"

"Yes. She came this morning. She is upstairs, sleeping."

"Rhoda saw her?"

"Yes."

"And left her? To you?"

"Yes. Left her to me."

He raised his head with a backward jerk and stared out of the window before him. She kept her eyes on his face, measuring its strength against hers. He was not measuring. He seemed to be seeing the beautiful and terrible things of which, he had told her, she was capable. She felt, when his eyes came back to her, that he had judged her.

"You see you can't," he said gently.

"Can't what? Can't keep her, you mean, of course."

"Anything but that. You can't abandon her — even for my sake."

So that had been the judgment. He saw only beauty.

"I shan't abandon her. I shall always be able to see as much of her as I did of Rhoda, and more. And she is different from Rhoda. I shan't have the special joy of her, but I shall have the good."

"Moreover," he went on, with perfect gentleness, putting her words aside, "I can't abandon Rhoda. All that you have said is true. But it does n't go far enough. You yourself, you know, see life too much in terms of irony, of fact rather than faith. You've owned that Rhoda is adventurous and honest; you've owned that she does n't lie to herself. Then she has growth in her. No human being can be like a flower or a fish or a stone. It was mere literature, your saying that. Every human being has futures and futures within it. You know it really. Why you yourself, though you are so old and fixed, are different now from what you were an hour ago. I am different, of course. And Rhoda will be different, too. She won't disintegrate me. She'll make me very miserable, doubtless; she has already. And I shall make her angry. But I shall hold her, and she'll change. You shall see. I promise you. And you will keep Jane Amoret, and she will be eternally different because of you."

Mrs. Delafield, while he spoke, had risen. She stood before him, grasping her gold chain on either side, her eyes very nearly level with his, and she summoned all her will, her strength, her wisdom to meet him. Yes, they had come to that, she and this boy.

"I accept all your faith," she said. "Only you must help me to make my world, and not yours, with it. Don't be afraid for Jane Amoret. I shall be firmly in her life. Rhoda shan't keep me out. She won't want to keep me out. Rhoda has far more chance of changing, of learning something from this experience, as a disconcerted and forgiven wife than as a sullen adventuress; and you —

you will not be miserable; not with Rhoda, at all events; and you will be free. I am going to send a wire to Rhoda, at once, and tell her that I have reconsidered my advice to her. That, in itself, will show her how I managed her this morning. I shall tell her that she must go to London to-night, to her father. And to-morrow I'll take Jane Amoret up and bring Rhoda and Niel together."

He took it all in, wide-eyed, he too now measuring the threat.

"You can't," he said; "I won't let you!"

"You'll have to let me. I have the fact on my side as well as the faith. She wants to leave you. She wants only the excuse of being asked. You can't stop my giving her the excuse." Yes, after all, her fact against his faith, she must have her way. What could his love for Rhoda and his feeling for herself do against the ironic fact that Rhoda, simply, was tired of him? "You must see that you can't force her to stay," she said. "You could n't even prevent her coming to me this morning."

She looked at him with all the force of her advantage and saw that before the cruel fact, and her determination, he knew his helplessness. It was, again, the bird arrested in its impulse; and a veil seemed to fall across his face, a shyness, almost a wildness to shut them out from each other. He dropped his eyes before her.

"Dear Mr. Darley, my dear young friend, see that it's best. See that it's best all round. See it with me," she begged. "I was wrong this morning; wrong from the very first. Let it come to that only. Count yourself out. It was of myself, of my own delight in the child that I was thinking. No,

not even thinking; I tried to think it was for her; but it was my own feeling that decided. If you had never come, it would still have been right to give her up — though I should never have seen it unless you'd come. It was almost a crime that I committed. They had asked me to implore her to go back; they trusted me. And I prevented the message coming to her. I did not believe the things I said to her — not as she thought I believed them. I did not care a rap about her dignity; you saw the falsity at once. I cared only about keeping Jane Amoret."

He stood there before her, remote, unmoved, with downcast, unanswering eyes.

"Are you angry? Don't you see it, too?" she pleaded.

"No." He shook his head. "You had a right to keep the child."

"Against all those other reasons? Against my own conscience?"

"Yes. Because you were strong enough. You were right, because you were strong enough. I believe in law, too, you see — unless one is strong enough to break it for something better. You were. It was a beautiful thing to do."

"But then, if you think me so strong, why not trust me now? This, now, is the thing I want to do."

"Because of me. It is n't against the law you are acting now; it 's against your own life. I am not angry. But it crushes me."

They stood there then, she deeply meditating, he fixed in his unyielding grief, for how long she could not have said. Parton's step outside broke in upon their mute opposition.

VI

She and Mr. Darley, Mrs. Delafield was aware, presented precisely the abstracted, alienated air that Parton would expect. The young man moved away to the window while she took from the salver the note Parton presented. Then, her hand arrested in the very act by a recognition,

"Is there an answer?" she asked.

"No answer, ma'am."

"Who brought it?"

"A man from the station, ma'am."

"Very well, Parton."

Parton was gone. Mr. Darley kept his back turned. She held the note in her hand and stared at it. The writing was Rhoda's; the envelope one of the station-master's. She had been at the station, then, when she wrote, four miles away. The London train, for which she had been waiting, had gone long since; it had gone before the arrival of Mr. Darley's.

An almost overpowering presage rose in her mind; she could hardly, for a moment, summon the decision with which to open the envelope. Then, reading as she stood, she felt the blood flow up to her face.

For it was almost too much, although it was, through Rhoda's act, she who had won finally. Even she, then, had not yet correctly measured Rhoda's irony or Rhoda's sardonic assurance. Rhoda, after all, did not care to keep up appearances with her, and, after all, why should she? Here was fact, and it had been fact all through. She wanted most to go back. She wanted it more

than to be dignified in her aunt's eyes, or, really, in anybody else's. Once back Rhoda would take care of her dignity. In a flash Mrs. Delafield saw how little, when all was said and done, Rhoda would pay.

DEAR AUNT ISABEL [she wrote, in her ample, tranquil hand]: I've been thinking over all you said and have come to the conclusion that you are considering me too much. I feel that I must consider my child. I have made a grave mistake and am not too proud to own it. Christopher and I are not at all fitted to make each other happy. So I have wired to father that I arrive this afternoon, and to Niel that I will see him to-morrow. I have written too, of course, to my poor Christopher. But he will understand me. Thank you so much, dear Aunt Isabel, for your kindness and helpfulness.

Your affectionate RHODA

P.S. Will you send nurse up with Jane Amoret within the week? Not at once, please; that would look rather foolish.

With the accumulated weight of absurdity, relief, dismay, she had sunk down into her chair, still gazing at the letter, and it was dismay that grew. As if with a violent jolt back to earth, Rhoda seemed to show her that life was not docile to nobilities. She hated to think that he must feel with her that shattering fall. There was nothing for them to do now for each other; no contest and no sacrifice. Rhoda had settled everything.

She spoke to him at last, and, as he came to her, not looking around at him, she held out the note.

He stood behind her to read it; and after that he did not speak.

She heard him move presently, vaguely, and then, vaguely, he drifted to and fro. He walked here and there; he paused, no doubt to feel his bones and to count how many had been broken, and then, with a start, he went on again.

"Please come where I can see you," she said at last.

He came at once, obediently, standing as he had stood a little while ago before the fire, his hands locked behind him, but now with face bent down, fixed in its effort to see clearly what had happened to them.

"You see, it was over. You see, you could n't have made anything of it." It was almost with tears that she besought him not to suffer too much. "You have nothing to regret, except having believed in her. Tell me that you are not too unhappy."

"I don't know what I am," Christopher said. "But I know I've more to regret than having believed in her. I've all the folly and mischief I've made." He had thought it out and she could not deny what he had seen, not even when he went on, "If it could have been in our way, — yours and mine, or, at least, what was yours this morning, when you thought you had kept her with me, — everything might have been atoned for. It might have meant a certain kind of beauty, and a certain kind of happiness, even, perhaps. But in this way, the way she's chosen, it only means just that — folly, mischief," — he turned to the fire and looked down into it, — "sin," he finished.

She could not deny it, even to give him comfort; but she could find something else. "It was Rhoda

who chose. You, whatever your mistakes, chose very differently. I'm not trying to shift responsibility; to make mistakes is to be foolish and mischievous. But can't even sin be atoned for? Does n't it all now depend on you? That you should make yourself worth it. You are the only one of us who can do that."

He turned to her and his eyes studied her with an unaccepting gentleness.

"You mean because I'm a poet? It is n't like you, really, to say that. You don't believe in poets and their mission in that sense. It's too facile."

"Not only because you are a poet. I was n't thinking so much of that, although your gift helps. But simply because you are young and good."

"I'm not good enough," said Christopher. "And I'm too young. You've shown me that. I am afraid of myself. I see what one can do while meaning the best."

She watched him with grave tenderness, feeling again, in his dispassionate capacity for accepted experience, his strange maturity. And knowing all that might be difficult, yet knowing that it would be, after all, to a decision like her own, the merest gossamers of convention that she must brave, she said, — and as she looked up at him his face seemed to blend with the face of her little, sleeping, lost Jane Amoret, — "Don't you think I, perhaps, could be of help, while you are so young?"

He did not understand her at all. He, too, was absorbed in his inner image of loss, yet he, too, was almost as aware of her as she of him, and his eyes, with their austere gentleness, dwelt on her, as if treasuring, of this last encounter, his completed vision of her.

"Yes, you will be. I shall never forget you and what you've been to me. I'll do my best," he promised her. "But I seem to have lost everything. I could be strong for her; I don't know that I can be strong enough for myself."

"That's what I mean," said Mrs. Delafield. "It takes years to be strong enough for one's self, and even when one's old one has n't sometimes learned how to be. I'm not sure, after this morning, that I've learned yet. But I know that I could be strong for you. Will you let me try? Will you let me take care of you a little and guard you from the Rhodas until the right person comes?"

"What do you mean?" he asked; and, answering the look in her face, tears sprang to his eyes.

"We belong to each other. Did n't you say it?" she smiled. "We are friends. We ought not to lose each other now."

"Oh! But —" He gazed at her. "How could you! After what I've done!"

"You've done nothing that makes me like you less."

"Oh — I can't! I can't!" said Christopher Darley. "How could I accept it from you? Already you've been unbelievably beautiful to me. It's not as if you were a Bohemian sort of creature, like me. Appearances must count for you. And the appearance of being friends with your niece's discarded lover — no — I can't see it for you. I can imagine you being above the law, but I can't imagine you being above appearances. I don't think that I should want you to be. I care about appearances, too, when they are yours."

It crossed her mind, with almost a mirthful sense of the sort of appearances she would have to deal

with, that Parton's face would be worth watching. Poor Tim's hovered more grievously in the background. But, after all, it would be a Tim with wounds well salved.

"It's just because mine are so secure and recognized, don't you see, that I can do what I like with them," she said. "It's not for me a question of appearances, but of realities. After all, my dear young man, what am I going to get out of it all? My roots have been torn up too, you know."

"Because of me! Because of me!" Christopher groaned. "Do you think you need remind me of that? Shall I ever forgive myself for it? Get out of it? You'll get nothing. You've been tormented between us all, and you lose Jane Amoret."

"Then don't let me lose you too," said Mrs. Delafield.

Again, with the tears, his blush sprang to his face, and he stood there incredulous, looking down at her, almost as helpless in the shyness the unexpected gift brought upon him as he had been when he first came in to her.

"Really you mean it?" he murmured. "Really I can do something for you, too? Because, unless I can, I could n't accept it."

"You can make me much less lonely, when she's gone," said Mrs. Delafield.

She knew that this was to give the gift in such a way as to ensure its acceptance; but he murmured, stung again intolerably by the thought of Jane Amoret, "Oh — I can't bear it for you!"

"You can help me to bear it."

Still he pressed upon her what he saw as her sacrifice.

"You mean that I may see you when I like? I

may always write and you'll always answer? I can sometimes, even, come and stay, like any other friend? Please realize that if you let me come down on you like that, I may come hard. I'm frightfully lonely, too."

"As hard as you like. I want you to come hard. Like any friend. Yes."

She was smiling up at the young man, and, as she had promised herself years for Jane Amoret, she promised herself now years — though not so many would be needed — for Christopher Darley. It was in the thought of what she could do for Christopher Darley that she saw Rhoda's punishment. Not for having left him, but for having taken him; for not having known what to do with him without taking him. And Rhoda would see it with her, if no one else did.

"Come, you must quite believe in me," she said. "Give me your hand, dear Christopher, and tell me that you take this meddling, commanding old woman to be your friend."

He had no words as he took the hand she gave him, but from his look it might have been as if he at last received into his keeping the great gift, the precious casket of the future; and his eyes, like those of a devout young knight, dedicated themselves to her service.

It was again gift and miracle; and though in her mind was the thought of all her mournings, and of the lost Jane Amoret, she felt, rooting itself in the darkness and sorrow, yet another flower.

"And now," she said, for they must not both begin to cry, "please ring the bell for me. The time has not quite come for your first visit; but, before you go, we will have our first tea together."

HEPATICAS

I

THER people's sons were coming home for the three or four days' leave. The first gigantic struggle — furious onslaught and grim resistance — was over. Paris, pale, and slightly shuddering still, stood safe. Calais was not taken, and, dug into their trenches, it was evident that the opposing armies would lie face to face with no decisive encounter possible until the spring.

There was, with all their beauty and terror, an element of the facetious in these unexpected holidays, of the matter-of-factness, the freedom from strain or sentiment that was the English oddity and the English strength. Men who had known the horrors of the retreat from Mons or the carnage of Ypres, who had not taken off their clothes for ten days at a stretch or slept for four nights, came home from trenches knee-deep in mud, from battlefields heaped with unburied dead, and appeared immaculate and cheerful at breakfast; a little sober and preoccupied, perhaps; touched, perhaps, with strangeness; but ready for the valorous family jest, and alluding to the war as if, while something too solemn for adequate comment, it were yet something that lent itself to laughter. One did such funny things, and saw them; of the other things

one did not speak; and there was the huge standing joke of an enemy who actually hated one. These grave and cheerful young men hated nobody; but they were very eager to go back again; and they were all ready, not only to die but to die good-humouredly. From the demeanour of mothers and wives and sisters it was evident that nothing would be said or done to make this readiness difficult; but Mrs. Bradley, who showed serenity to the world and did not even when alone allow herself to cry, suspected that the others, beneath their smiles, carried hearts as heavy with dread as her own.

It had been heavy, with hope now as well as with dread, for the past week. It was a week since she had last heard from Jack. Mrs. Crawley over the hill, had had a wire, and her husband was now with her; and Lady Wrexham expected her boy to-morrow. There was no certainty at all as regarded herself; yet at any moment she might have her wire; and feeling to-day the stress of waiting too great to be borne in passivity, she left her books and letters and put on her gardening shoes and gloves and went out to her borders.

For weeks now the incessant rain had made the relief and solace of gardening almost an impossibility; but to-day was mild and clear. There was no radiance in the air; curtains of pearly mist shut out the sky; yet here and there a soft opening in the white showed a pale, far blue, gentle and remote as the gaze of a wandering goddess, and the hills seemed to smile quietly up at the unseen sun. Mrs. Bradley, as she went along the river-path, could look across at the hills; the river-path and the hills were the great feature of Dorrington, — the placid, comely red brick house to which she and Jack had

come fifteen years ago, after the death of her husband in India. Enclosed by woods, and almost catching sight of the road, — from its upper windows and over its old brick wall, — the house would have seemed to her too commonplace and almost suburban, in spite of the indubitably old oak-panelling of the drawing-room, had it not been for the river and the hills. Stepping out on to the lawn from the windows of the drawing-room, she and Jack, on that April day, had found themselves confronting both — the limpid, rapid little stream, spanned near the house by its mossy bridge, and the hills, beyond the meadows, streaked with purple woodlands and rising, above the woods, to slopes russet, fawn, and azure. Jack, holding her by the hand, had pointed at once with an eager "Is n't it pretty, mummy!" — even at eight he had cared almost as much as she, and extraordinarily in the same way, for the sights of the country; and if the hills had n't settled the question, it was settled, quite finally, ten minutes later, by the white hepaticas.

They had come upon them suddenly, after their tour of the walled kitchen garden and their survey of the lawn with its ugly shrubberies, — now long forgotten, — penetrating a thicket of hazels and finding themselves in an opening under trees where neighbouring woods looked at them over an old stone wall, and where, from an old stone bench, one could see the river. The ground was soft with the fallen leaves of many an autumn; a narrow path ran, half obliterated, down to the river; and among the faded brown, everywhere, rose the thick clusters, the dark leaves, and the snowy flowers, — poignant, amazing in their beauty.

She and Jack had stopped short to gaze. She had never before seen such white hepaticas, or so many, or so placed. And Jack, presently, lifting his dear nut-brown head and nut-brown eyes, had said, gazing up at her as he had gazed at the flowers, "They are just like you, mummy."

She had felt at once that they were like her; more like than the little boy's instinct could grasp. He had thought of the darkness and whiteness; her widow's weeds and pale face had suggested that; but he could not know the sorrow, the longing, the earthly sense of irreparable loss, the heavenly sense of a possession unalterably hers, that the dark, melancholy leaves and celestial whiteness of the flowers expressed to her. Tears had risen to her eyes and she had stooped and kissed her child, — how like her husband's that little face! — and had said, after a moment, "We must never leave them, Jack."

They had never left them. Dorrington had been their home for fifteen years, and the hepaticas the heart of it. It had always seemed to them both the loveliest ritual of the year, that early spring one when, in the hazel copse, they would find the white hepaticas again in flower. And of all the garden labours none were sweeter than those that cherished and divided and protected the beloved flowers.

Mrs. Bradley, to-day, worked in her long border, weeding, forking, placing belated labels. She was dressed in black, her straw hat bound beneath her chin by a ribbon and her soft gardening gloves rolling back from her firm, white wrists. Her gestures expressed a calm energy, an accurate grace. She was tall, and when she raised herself to look over the meadows at the hills, she showed small,

decisive features, all marked, in the pallor of her face, as if with the delicate, neutral emphasis of an etching: the grey, scrutinizing eyes, the charming yet ugly nose, the tranquil mouth that had, at the corners, a little fall, half sweet, half bitter, as if with tears repressed or a summoned smile. Squared at brow and chin, it would, but for the mildness of the gaze, have been an imperious face; and her head, its whitened hair drawn back and looped in wide braids behind, had an air at once majestic and unworldly.

She had worked for over an hour and the last label was set beside a precious clump of iris. The hazel copse lay near by; and gathering up her tools, drawing off her wet gloves, she followed the path under the leafless branches and among the hepatica leaves to the stone bench, where, sinking down, she knew that she was very tired. She could see, below the bank, the dark, quick stream; a pale, diffused light in the sky showed where the sun was dropping toward the hills.

Where was Jack at this moment, this quiet moment of a monotonous English winter day? — so like the days of all the other years that it was impossible to think of what was happening a few hours' journey away across the Channel. Impossible to think of it; yet the thick throb of her heart spoke to the full of its significance. She had told herself from the beginning — passionate, rebellious creature as, at bottom, she knew herself to be, always in need of discipline and only in these later years schooled to a control and submission that, in her youth, she would have believed impossible to her — she had told herself, when he had gone from her, that, as a soldier's widow, she must see her

soldier son go to death. She must give him to that; be ready for it; and if he came back to her it would be as if he were born again, a gift, a grace, unexpected and unclaimed. She must feel, for herself as well as for her country, that these days of dread were also days of a splendour and beauty unmatched by any in England's history, and that a soldier's widow must ask for no more glorious fate for her son than death in such a cause. She had told herself all this many times; yet, as she sat there, her hands folded on her lap, her eyes on the stream below, she felt that she was now merely motherhood, tense, huddled, throbbing and longing, longing for its child.

Then, suddenly, she heard Jack's footsteps. They came, quick and light, along the garden path; they entered the wood; they were near, but softened by the fallen leaves. And, half rising, afraid of her own joy, she hardly knew that she saw him before she was in his arms; and it was better to meet thus, in the blindness and darkness of their embrace, her cheek pressed against his hair, his head buried close between her neck and shoulder.

"Jack! — Jack!" she heard herself say.

He said nothing, holding her tightly to him, with quick breaths; and even after she had opened her eyes and could look down at him, — her own, her dear, beautiful Jack, — could see the nut-brown head, the smooth brown cheek, the firm brown hand which grasped her, he did not for a long time raise his head and look at her. When, at last, he did look up, she could not tell, through her tears, whether, like herself, he was trying to smile.

They sat down together on the bench. She did not ask him why he had not wired. That question

pressed too sharply on her heart; to ask might seem to reproach.

"Darling — you are so thin, — so much older, — but you look — strong and well."

"We're all of us extraordinarily fit, mummy. It's wholesome, living in mud."

"And wholesome living among bursting shells? I had your last letter telling of that miraculous escape."

"There have been a lot more since then. Every day seems a miracle — that one's alive at the end of it."

"But you get used to it?"

"All except the noise. That always seems to daze me still. Some of our fellows are deaf from it. — You heard of Toppie, mother?" Jack asked.

Toppie was Alan Graham, Jack's nearest friend. He had been killed ten days before.

"I heard it, Jack. Were you with him?"

"Yes. It was in a bayonet charge. He did n't suffer. A bullet went right through him. He just gave a little cry and fell." Jack's voice had the mildness of a sorrow that has passed beyond the capacity for emotion. "We found him afterwards. He is buried out there."

"You must tell Frances about it, Jack. I went to her at once." Frances was Toppie's sister. "She is bearing it so bravely."

"I must write to her. She would be sure to be plucky."

He answered all her questions, sitting closely against her, his arm around her; looking down, while he spoke, and twisting, as had always been his boyish way, a button on her coat. He was at that enchanting moment of young manhood when

the child is still apparent in the man. His glance was shy yet candid; his small, firm lips had a child's gravity. With his splendid shoulders, long legs, and noble little head, he was yet as endearing as he was impressive. His mother's heart ached with love and pride and fear as she gazed at him.

And a question came, near the sharp one, yet hoping to evade it: —

"Jack, dearest, how long will you be with me? How long is the leave?"

He raised his eyes then and looked at her; a curious look. Something in it blurred her mind with a sense of some other sort of fear.

"Only till to-night," he said.

It seemed confusion rather than pain that she felt. "Only till to-night, Jack? But Richard Crawley has been back for three days already. I thought they gave you longer?"

"I know, mummy." His eyes were dropped again and his hand at the button — did it tremble? — twisted and untwisted. "I've been back for three days already. — I've been in London."

"In London?" Her breath failed her. The sense of alien fear became a fog, horrible, suffocating. "But — Jack — why?"

"I did n't wire, mummy, because I knew I'd have to be there for most of my time. I felt I could n't wire and tell you. I felt I had to see you when I told you. Mother — I'm married. — I came back to get married. — I was married this morning. — Oh, mother, can you ever forgive me?"

His shaking hands held her and his eyes could not meet hers.

She felt the blood rush, as if her heart had been divided with a sword, to her throat, to her eyes,

choking her, burning her; and as if from far away she heard her own voice saying, after a little time had passed, "There's nothing I could n't forgive you, Jack. Tell me. Don't be afraid of hurting me."

He held her tightly, still looking down as he said, "She is a dancer, mother, a little dancer. It was in London, last summer. A lot of us came up from Aldershot together. She was in the chorus of one of those musical comedies. Mother, you can never understand. But it was n't just low and vulgar. She was so lovely, — so very young, — with the most wonderful golden hair and the sweetest eyes. — I don't know. — I simply went off my head when I saw her. We all had supper together afterwards. Toppie knew one of the other girls, and Dollie was there. That 's her name — Dollie Vaughan — her stage name. Her real name was Watson. Her people, I think, were little tradespeople, and she'd lost her father and mother, and an aunt had been very unkind. She told me all about it that night. Mother, please believe just this: it was n't only the obvious thing. — I know I can't explain. But you remember, when we read *War and Peace*" — his broken voice groped for the analogy — "You remember Natacha, when she falls in love with Anatole, and nothing that was real before seems real, and she is ready for anything. — It was like that. It was all fairyland, like that. No one thought it wrong. It did n't seem wrong. Everything went together."

She had gathered his hand closely in hers and she sat there, quiet, looking at her hopes lying slain before her. Her Jack. The wife who was, perhaps, to have been his. The children that she, perhaps,

should have seen. All dead. The future blotted out. Only this wraith-like present; only this moment of decision; Jack and his desperate need the only real things left.

And after a moment, for his labouring breath had failed, she said, "Yes, dear?" and smiled at him.

He covered his face with his hands. "Mother, I've ruined your life."

He had, of course, in ruining his own; yet even at that moment of wreckage she was able to remember, if not to feel, that life could mend from terrible wounds, could marvellously grow from compromises and defeats. "No, dearest, no," she said. "While I have you, nothing is ruined. We shall see what can be done. Go on. Tell me the rest."

He put out his hand to hers again and sat now a little turned away from her, speaking on in his deadened, bitter voice.

"There was n't any glamour after that first time. I only saw her once or twice again. I was awfully sorry and ashamed over the whole thing. Her company left London, on tour, and then the war came, and I simply forgot all about her. And the other day, over there, I had a letter from her. She was in terrible trouble. She was ill and had no money, and no work. And she was going to have a child — my child; and she begged me to send her a little money to help her through, or she did n't know what would become of her."

The fog, the horrible confusion, even the despair, had passed now. The sense of ruin, of wreckage almost irreparable, was there; yet with it, too, was the strangest sense of gladness. He was her own Jack, completely hers, for she saw now why he had

done it; she could be glad that he had done it. "Go on, dear," she said. "I understand; I understand perfectly."

"O mother, bless you!" He put her hand to his lips, bowing his head upon it for a moment. "I was afraid you could n't. I was afraid you could n't forgive me. But I had to do it. I thought it all over — out there. Everything had become so different after what one had been through. One saw everything differently. Some things did n't matter at all, and other things mattered tremendously. This was one of them. I knew I could n't just send her money. I knew I could n't bear to have the poor child born without a name and with only that foolish little mother to take care of it. And when I found I could get this leave, I knew I must marry her. That was why I did n't wire. I thought I might not have time to come to you at all."

"Where is she, Jack?" Her voice, her eyes, her smile at him, showed him that, indeed, she understood perfectly.

"In lodgings that I found for her; nice and quiet, with a kind landlady. She was in such an awful place in Ealing. She is so changed, poor little thing. I should hardly have known her. Mother, darling, I wonder, could you just go and see her once or twice? She's frightfully lonely; and so very young. — If you could. — If you would just help things along a little till the baby comes, I should be so grateful. And, then, if I don't come back, will you, for my sake, see that they are safe?"

"But, Jack," she said, smiling at him, "she is coming here, of course. I shall go and get her tomorrow."

He stared at her and his colour rose. "Get her? Bring her here, to stay?"

"Of course, darling. And if you don't come back, I will take care of them, always."

"But, mother," said Jack, and there were tears in his eyes, "you don't know, you don't realize. I mean — she's a dear little thing — but you could n't be happy with her. She'd get most frightfully on your nerves. She's just — just a silly little dancer who has got into trouble."

Jack was clear-sighted. Every vestige of fairy-land had vanished. And she was deeply thankful that they should see alike, while she answered, "It's not exactly a time for considering one's nerves, is it, Jack? I hope I shan't get on hers. I must just try and make her as happy as I can."

She made it all seem natural and almost sweet. The tears were in his eyes, yet he had to smile back at her when she said, "You know that I am good at managing people. I'll manage her. And perhaps when you come back, my darling, she won't be a silly little dancer."

They sat now for a little while in silence. While they had talked, a golden sunset, slowly, had illuminated the western sky. The river below them was golden, and the wintry woodlands bathed in light. Jack held her hands and gazed at her. Love could say no more than his eyes, in their trust and sorrow, said to her; she could never more completely possess her son. Sitting there with him, hand in hand, while the light slowly ebbed and twilight fell about them, she felt it to be, in its accepted sorrow, the culminating and transfiguring moment of her maternity.

When they at last rose to go it was the hour for

Jack's departure, and it had become almost dark. Far away, through the trees, they could see the lighted windows of the house that waited for them, but to which she must return alone. With his arms around her shoulders, Jack paused a moment, looking about him. "Do you remember that day — when we first came here, mummy?" he asked.

She felt in him suddenly a sadness deeper than any he had yet shown her. The burden of the past she had lifted from him; but he must bear now the burden of what he had done to her, to their life, to all the future. And, protesting against his pain, her mother's heart strove still to shelter him while she answered, as if she did not feel his sadness, "Yes, dear, and do you remember the hepaticas on that day?"

"Like you," said Jack in a gentle voice. "I can hardly see the plants. Are they all right?"

"They are doing beautifully."

"I wish the flowers were out," said Jack. "I wish it were the time for the flowers to be out, so that I could have seen you and them together, like that first day." And then, putting his head down on her shoulder, he murmured, "It will never be the same again. I've spoiled everything for you."

But he was not to go from her uncomforted. She found the firmest voice in which to answer him, stroking his hair and pressing him to her with the full reassurance of her resolution. "Nothing is spoiled, Jack, nothing. You have never been so near me — so how can anything be spoiled? And when you come back, darling, you'll find your son, perhaps; and the hepaticas may be in flower, waiting for you."

II

Mrs. Bradley and her daughter-in-law sat together in the drawing-room. They sat opposite each other on the two chintz chesterfields placed at right angles to the pleasantly blazing fire, the chintz curtains drawn against a rainy evening. It was a long, low room, with panelled walls; and, like Mrs. Bradley's head, it had an air at once majestic, decorated, and old-fashioned. It was a rather crowded room, with many deep chairs and large couches, many tables with lamps and books and photographs upon them, many porcelains, prints, and pots of growing flowers. Mrs. Bradley, her tea-table before her, was in her evening black silk; lace ruffles rose about her throat; she wore her accustomed necklace of old enamel, blue, black, and white, set with small diamonds, and the enamel locket that had within it Jack's face on one side and his father's on the other; her white hands, moving gently among the teacups, showed an ancient cluster of diamonds above the slender wedding-ring. From time to time she lifted her eyes and smiled quietly over at her daughter-in-law. It was the first time that she had really seen Dollie, that is, in any sense that meant contemplative observation. Dollie had spent her first week at Dorrington in bed, sodden with fatigue rather than ill. "What you need," Mrs. Bradley had said, "is to go to sleep for a fortnight"; and Dollie had almost literally carried out the prescription.

Stealing carefully into the darkened room, with its flowers and open windows and steadily glowing fire, Mrs. Bradley had stood and looked for long

moments at all that she could see of her daughter-in-law, — a flushed, almost babyish face lying on the pillow between thick golden braids, sleeping so deeply, so unconsciously, — her sleep making her mother-in-law think of a little boat gliding slowly yet steadily on and on, between new shores; so that, when she was to awake and look about her, it would be as if, with no bewilderment or readjustment, she found herself transformed, a denizen of an altered world. That was what Mrs. Bradley wanted, that Dollie should become an inmate of Dorrington with as little effort or consciousness for any of them as possible, and the drowsy days and nights of infantine slumbers seemed indeed to have brought her very near.

She and Pickering, the admirable woman who filled so skilfully the combined positions of lady's maid and parlourmaid in her little establishment, had braided Dollie's thick tresses, one on either side, — Mrs. Bradley laughing a little and both older women touched, almost happy in their sense of something so young and helpless to take care of. Pickering understood, nearly as well as Jack's mother, that Master Jack, as he had remained to her, had married very much beneath him; but at this time of tragic issues and primitive values, she, nearly as much as Jack's mother, felt only the claim, the pathos of youth and helplessness. It was as if they had a singularly appealing case of a refugee to take care of; social and even moral appraisals were inapplicable to such a case, and Mrs. Bradley felt that she had never so admired Pickering as when seeing that for her, too, they were in abeyance. It was a comfort to feel so fond of Pickering at a time when one was in need of any

comfort one could get; and to feel that, creature of codes and discriminations as she was, to a degree that had made her mistress sometimes think of her as a sort of Samurai of service, a function rather than a person, she was even more fundamentally a kind and Christian woman. Between them, cook intelligently sustaining them from below and the housemaids helpful in their degree, they fed and tended and nursed Dollie, and by that eighth day she was more than ready to get up and go down and investigate her new surroundings.

She sat there now, in the pretty tea-gown her mother-in-law had bought for her, leaning back against her cushions, one arm lying along the back of the couch and one foot in its patent-leather shoe, with its sparkling buckle and alarming heel, thrusting forward a carefully arched instep. The attitude made one realize, however completely tenderer preoccupations held the foreground of one's consciousness, how often and successfully she must have sat to theatrical photographers. Her way of smiling, too, very softly, yet with the effect of a calculated and dazzling display of pearly teeth, was impersonal, and directed, as it were, to the public *via* the camera rather than to any individual interlocutor. Mrs. Bradley even imagined, unversed as she was in the methods of Dollie's world, that of allurement in its conscious and determined sense she was almost innocent. She placed herself, she adjusted her arm and her foot, and she smiled gently; intention hardly went further than that wish to look her best.

Pink and white and gold as she was, and draped there on the chesterfield in a profusion of youth and a frivolity that was yet all passivity, she made her

mother-in-law think, and with a certain sinking of the heart, of a Dorothy Perkins rose, a flower she had never cared for; and Dollie carried on the analogy in the sense she gave that there were such myriads more just like her. On almost every page of every illustrated weekly paper, one saw the ingenuous, limpid eyes, the display of eyelash, the lips, their outline emphasized by just that touch of rouge, those copious waves of hair. Like the Dorothy Perkins roses on their pergolas, so these pretty faces seemed — looped, draped, festooned — to climb over all the available spaces of the modern press.

But this, Mrs. Bradley told herself, was to see Dollie with a dry, hard eye, was to see her superficially, from the social rather than from the human point of view. Under the photographic creature must lie the young, young girl, — so young, so harmless that it would be very possible to mould her, with all discretion, all tenderness, into some suitability as Jack's wife. Dollie, from the moment that she had found her, a sodden, battered rose indeed, in the London lodging-house, had shown herself grateful, even humble, and endlessly acquiescent. She had not shown herself at all abashed or apologetic, and that had been a relief; had counted for her, indeed, in her mother-in-law's eyes, as a sort of innocence, a sort of dignity. But if Dollie were contented with her new mother-in-law, and very grateful to her, she was also contented with herself; Mrs. Bradley had been aware of this at once; and she knew now that if she were being carefully and commendingly watched while she poured out the tea, this concentration did not imply unqualified approval. Dollie was the type of

young woman to whom she herself stood as the type of the "perfect lady"; but with the appreciation went the proviso of the sharp little London mind, — versed in the whole ritual of smartness as it displayed itself at theatre or restaurant, — that she was a rather dowdy one. She was a lady, perfect but not smart, while, at the same time, the quality of her defect was, she imagined, a little bewildering and therefore a little impressive. Actually to awe Dollie and to make her shy, it would be necessary to be smart; but it was far more pleasant and perhaps as efficacious merely to impress her, and it was as well that Dollie should be impressed; for anything in the nature of an advantage that she could recognize would make it easier to direct, protect, and mould her.

She asked her a good many leisurely and unstressed questions on this first evening, and drew Dollie to ask her others in return; and she saw herself stooping thoughtfully over a flourishing young plant that yet needed transplanting, softly moving the soil about its roots, softly finding out if there were any very deep tap-root that would have to be dealt with. But Dollie, so far as tastes and ideas went, hardly seemed to have any roots at all; so few that it was a question if any change of soil could affect a creature so shallow. She smiled, she was at ease; she showed her complete assurance that a young lady so lavishly endowed with all the most significant gifts, need not occupy herself with mental adornments.

"You're a great one for books, I see," she commented, looking about the room; "I suppose you do a great deal of reading down here to keep from feeling too dull"; and she added that she herself,

if there was "nothing doing," liked a good novel, especially if she had a box of sweets to eat while she read it.

"You shall have a box of sweets to-morrow," Mrs. Bradley told her, "with or without the novel, as you like."

And Dollie thanked her, watching her cut the cake, and, as the rain lashed against the windows, remarking on the bad weather and cheerfully hoping that "poor old Jack" was n't in those horrid trenches. "I think war's a wicked thing, don't you, Mrs. Bradley?" she added.

When Dollie talked in this conventionally solicitous tone of Jack, her mother-in-law could but wish her upstairs again, merely young, merely the tired and battered refugee. She had not much tenderness for Jack, that was evident, nor much imaginativeness in regard to the feelings of Jack's mother. But she soon passed from the theme of Jack and his danger. Her tea was finished and she got up and went to the piano, remarking that there was one thing she *could* do. "Poor mother used to always say I was made of music. From the time I was a mere tot I could pick out anything on the piano." And placing herself, pressing down the patent-leather shoe on the loud pedal, she surged into a waltz as foolish and as conventionally alluring as her own eyes. Her inaccuracy was equalled only by her facility. Smiling, swaying over the keys with alternate speed and languor, she addressed her audience with altogether the easy mastery of a music-hall *artiste:* "It's a lovely thing — one of my favourites. I'll often play, Mrs. Bradley, and cheer us up. There is nothing like music for that, is there? it speaks so to the heart."

And, whole-heartedly, indeed, she accompanied the melody by a passionate humming.

The piano was Jack's and it was poor Jack who was made of music. How was he to bear it, his mother asked herself, as she sat listening. Dollie, after that initiation, spent many hours at the piano every day, — so many and such noisy hours, that her mother-in-law, unnoticed, could shut herself in the little morning-room that overlooked the brick wall at the front of the house and had the morning sun.

It was difficult to devise other occupations for Dollie. She earnestly disclaimed any wish to have proper music lessons, and when her mother-in-law, patiently persistent, arranged for a skilful mistress to come down twice a week from London, Dollie showed such apathy and dulness that any hope of developing such musical ability as she possessed had to be abandoned. She did not like walking, and the sober pageant of the winter days was a blank book to her. Sewing, she said, had always given her frightful fidgets; and it was with the strangest sense of a privilege, a joy, unhoped-for and now thrust upon her, that Mrs. Bradley sat alone working at the little garments that meant all her future and all Jack's. The baby seemed already more hers than Dollie's.

Sometimes, on a warm afternoon, Dollie, wrapped in her fur cloak, would emerge for a little while and watch her mother-in-law at work in her borders. The sight amused and surprised but hardly interested her, and she soon went tottering back to the house on the preposterous heels that Mrs. Bradley had, as yet, found no means of tactfully banishing. And sometimes, when the piano again

resounded, Mrs. Bradley would leave her borders and retreat to the hazel-copse, where, as she sat on the stone bench, she could hear, through the soft sound of the running water, hardly more than the distant beat and hum of Dollie's waltzes; and where, with more and more the sense of escape and safety, she could find a refuge from the sight and sound and scent of Dollie, — the thick, sweet, penetrating scent that was always to be indelibly associated in her mind with this winter of foreboding, of hope, and of growing hopelessness.

In her letters to Jack, she found herself, involuntarily at first, and then deliberately, altering, suppressing, even falsifying. While Dollie had been in bed, when so much hope had been possible of a creature so unrevealed, she had written very tenderly, and she continued, now, to write tenderly, and it was not false to do that; she could feel no hardness or antagonism against poor Dollie. But she continued to write hopefully, as every day hope grew less.

Jack, himself, did not say much of Dollie, though there was always the affectionate message and the affectionate inquiry. But what was difficult to deal with were the hints of his anxiety and fear that stole among the terse, cheerful descriptions of his precarious days. What was she doing with herself? How were she and Dollie getting on? Did Dollie care about any of the things she cared about?

She told him that they got on excellently well, that Dollie spent a good deal of time at the piano, and that when they went out to tea people were perfectly nice and understanding. She knew, indeed, that she could depend on her friends to be that. They accepted Dollie on the terms she asked

for her. From friends so near as Mrs. Crawley and Lady Wrexham she had not concealed the fact that Dollie was a misfortune; but if others thought so they were not to show it. She still hoped, by degrees, to make Dollie a figure easier to deal with at such neighbourly gatherings. She had abandoned any hope that Dollie would grow; anything so feeble and so foolish could not grow; there was no other girl under the little dancer; she was simply no more and no less than she showed herself to be; but, at this later stage of their relationship, Mrs. Bradley essayed, now and then, a deliberate if kindly severity, — as to heels, as to scents, as to touches of rouge.

"Oh, but I'm as careful, just as careful, Mrs. Bradley!" Dollie protested. "I can't walk in lower heels. They hurt my instep. I've a very high instep and it needs support." She was genuinely amazed that any one could dislike her scent and that any one could think the rouge unbecoming. She seemed to acquiesce, but the acquiescence was followed by moods of mournfulness and even by tears. There was no capacity in her for temper or rebellion, and she was all unconscious of giving a warning as she sobbed, "It's nothing — really nothing, Mrs. Bradley. I'm sure you mean to be kind. Only — it's rather quiet and lonely here. I've always been used to so many people, — to having everything so bright and jolly."

She was not rapacious; she was not dissolute; she could be kept respectable and even contented if she were not made too aware of the contrast between her past existence and her present lot. With an air only of pensive pride she would sometimes point out to Mrs. Bradley, in the pages of those same

illustrated weeklies with which her mother-in-law associated her, the face of some former companion. One of these young ladies had recently married the son of a peer. "She *is* in luck, Floss," said Dollie. "We always thought it would come to that. He's been gone on her for ages, but his people were horrid."

Mrs. Bradley felt that, at all events, Dollie had no ground for thinking her "horrid"; yet she imagined that there lay drowsing at the back of her mind a plaintive little sense of being caught and imprisoned. Floss had stepped, triumphant, from the footlights to the registrar's office, and apparently had succeeded in uniting the radiance of her past and present status. No, Dollie could be kept respectable and contented only if the pressure were of the lightest. She could not change, she could only shift; and although Mrs. Bradley felt that for herself, her life behind her, her story told, she could manage to put up with a merely shifted Dollie, she could not see how Jack was to manage it. What was Jack to do with her? was the thought that pressed with a growing weight on her heart. She could never be of Jack's life; yet here she was, in it, planted there by his own generous yet inevitable act, and by hers, — in its very centre, and not to be evaded or forgotten.

And the contrast between what Jack's life might have been and what it now must be was made more poignantly apparent to her when Frances Graham came down to stay from a Saturday to Monday; Frances in her black, tired and thin from Red-Cross work in London; bereaved in more, her old friend knew, than dear Toppie's death; yet with her leisurely, unstressed cheerfulness almost un-

altered, the lightness that went with so much tenderness, the drollery that went with so much depth. Dearest, most charming of girls — but for Jack's wretched stumble into "fairyland" last summer, destined obviously to be his wife, — could any presence have shown more disastrously, in its contrast with poor Dollie, how Jack had done for himself? She watched the two together that evening, Frances with her thick crinkled hair and clearly curved brow and her merry, steady eyes, leaning, elbow on knee, to talk and listen to Dollie; and Dollie, poor Dollie, flushed, touched with an unbecoming sulkiness, aware, swiftly and unerringly, of a rival type. Frances was of the type that young men married when they did not "do for themselves." There was now no gulf of age or habit to veil from Dollie her disadvantage. She answered shortly, with now and then a dry, ironic little laugh; and, getting up at last, she went to the piano and loudly played.

"He could n't have done differently. It was the only thing he could do," Frances said that night before her bedroom fire. She did not hide her recognition of Jack's plight, but she was staunch.

"I would n't have had him do differently. But it will ruin his life," said the mother. "If he comes back it will ruin his life."

"No, no," said Frances, looking at the flames. "Why should it? A man does n't depend on his marriage like that. He has his career."

"Yes. He has his career. A career is n't a life."

"Is n't it?" The girl gazed down. "But it's what so many people have to put up with. And so many have n't even a career." Something came into her voice and she turned from it quickly. "He's

crippled, in a sense, of course. But you are here. He will have you to come back to always."

"I shall soon be old, dear, and she will always be here. That's inevitable. Some day I shall have to leave her to Jack to bear with alone."

"She may become more of a companion."

"No; no, she won't." The bitterness of the mother's heart expressed itself in the dry, light utterance. It was a comfort to express bitterness, for once, to somebody.

"She is a harmless little thing," Frances offered after a moment.

"Harmless?" Mrs. Bradley turned it over drily and lightly. "I can't feel her that. I feel her blameless if you like. And it will be easy to keep her contented. That is really the best that one can say of poor Dollie. And then there will be the child. I am pinning all my hopes to the child, Frances."

Frances understood that.

Dollie, as the winter wore on, kept remarkably well. She had felt it the proper thing to allude to Jack and his danger; and so, now, she more and more frequently felt it the proper thing to allude, humorously if with a touch of melancholy, to "baby." Her main interest in baby, Mrs. Bradley felt, was an alarmed one. She was a good deal frightened, poor little soul, and in need of constant reassurances; and it was when one need only pet and pity Dollie that she was easier to deal with. Mrs. Bradley tried to interest her in plans for the baby; what it should be named, and how its hair should be done if it were a little girl,—for only on this assumption could Dollie's interest be at all vividly roused; and Mrs. Bradley more than ever hoped for a boy when she found Dollie's

idle yet stubborn thoughts fixed on the name of Gloria.

She was able to evade discussion of this point, and when the baby came, fortunately and robustly, into the world on a fine March morning, she could feel it as a minor but very real cause for thanksgiving that Dollie need now never know what she thought of Gloria as a name. The baby was a boy, and now that he was here Dollie seemed as well pleased that he should be a commonplace Jack, and that there should be no question of tying his hair with cockades of ribbon over each ear. Smiling and rosy and languid, she lay in her charming room, not at all more maternal — though she showed a bland satisfaction in her child and noted that his eyes were just like Jack's — yet subtly more wifely. Baby, she no doubt felt, with the dim instinct that did duty for thought with her, placed and rooted her and gave her final rights. She referred now to Jack with the pensive but open affection of their shared complacency, and made her mother-in-law think, as she lay there, of a soft and sleepy and tenacious creeper, fixing tentacle after tentacle in the walls of Jack's house of life.

If only one could feel that she had furnished it with a treasure! Gravely, with a sad fondness, the grandmother studied the little face, so unfamiliar, for signs of Jack. She was a helplessly clear-sighted woman, and remembrance was poignantly vivid in her of Jack's face at a week old. Already she loved the baby since its eyes, indubitably, were his; but she could find no other trace of him. It was not a Bradley baby; and in the dreamy, foreboding flickers of individuality that pass uncannily across an infant's features, her melancholy and steady

discernment could see only the Watson ancestry.

She was to do all she could for the baby; to save him, so far as might be, from his Watson ancestry and to keep him, so far as might be, Jack's and hers. That was to be her task. But with all the moulding that could, mercifully, be applied from the very beginning, she could not bring herself to believe that this was ever to be a very significant human being.

She sent Jack his wire: "A son. Dollie doing splendidly." And she had his answer: "Best thanks. Love to Dollie." It was curious, indeed, this strange new fact they had now, always, to deal with; this light little "Dollie" that must be passed between them. The baby might have made Jack happy, but it had not solved the problem of his future.

III

A WEEK later the telegram was brought to her telling her that he had been killed in action.

It was a beautiful spring day, just such a day as that on which she and Jack had first seen Dorrington, and she had been working in the garden. When she had read, she turned and walked down the path that led to the hazel-copse. She hardly knew what had happened to her; there was only an instinct for flight, concealment, secrecy; but, as she walked, there rose in her, without sound, as if in a nightmare, the terrible cry of her loneliness. The dark wet earth that covered him seemed heaped upon her heart.

The hazel-copse was tasselled thickly with golden-green, and as she entered it she saw that

the hepaticas were in flower. They seemed to shine with their own celestial whiteness, set in their melancholy green among the fallen leaves. She had never seen them look so beautiful.

She followed the path, looking down at them, and she seemed to feel Jack's little hand in hers and to see, at her side, his nut-brown head. It had been on just such a morning. She came to the stone bench; but the impulse that had led her here was altered. She did not sink down and cover her face, but stood looking around her at the flowers, the telegram still open in her hand; and slowly, with stealing calm, the sense of sanctuary fell about her.

She had lost him, and with him went all her life. He was dead, his youth and strength and beauty. Yet what was this strange up-welling of relief, deep, deep relief, for Jack; this gladness, poignant and celestial, like that of the hepaticas? He was dead and the dark earth covered him; yet he was here, with her, safe in his youth and strength and beauty forever. He had died the glorious death, and no future, tangled, perplexed, fretful with its foolish burden, lay before him. There was no loss for Jack; no fading, no waste. The burden was for her and he was free.

Later when pain should have dissolved thought her agony would come to her unalleviated; but this hour was hers and his. She heard the river and the soft whisperings of spring. A bird dropped lightly unafraid from branch to branch of a tree near by. From the woods came the rapid insistent tapping of a woodpecker; and as in so many springs she seemed to hear Jack say, "Hark, mummy," and his little hand was always held in hers. And everywhere telling of irreparable loss, of a

possession unalterable, the tragic, the celestial hepaticas.

She sat down on the stone bench now and closed her eyes for a little while so holding them more closely — Jack and the hepaticas — together.

DAFFODILS

I

THOUGH he knew that he was going to die, Marmaduke Follett as he lay in the hospital on the French coast had never in his life been so happy. Until these last days he had not been able to feel it in its completeness. Of the great engagement where he had fallen he remembered only the overwhelming uproar, the blood and mud; and after that, torments, apathies, dim awakenings to the smell of ether and relapses to acquiescent sleep. Now the last operation had failed — or rather, he had failed to recover from it — and there was no more hope for him; but he hardly suffered and his thoughts were emerging into a world of cleanliness, kindness, and repose.

The hospital before the war had been a big hotel, and his was one of the bedrooms on the second floor, its windows crossed by two broad blue bands of sea and sky. As an officer he had a room to himself. The men were in the wards downstairs.

One of his nurses — both were pleasant girls but this was the one who with a wing of black hair curving under her cap reminded him of his cousin Victoria — had put a glass of daffodils beside his

bed, not garden daffodils, but the wild ones that grow in woods; and if she made him think of Victoria how much more they made him think of the woods in spring at Channerley!

He was dying after a gallant deed. It was a fitting death for a Follett and so little in his life had been at all fitted to that initial privilege: it was only in the manner of his death that his life matched at all those thoughts of Victoria and Channerley.

He did not remember much of the manner; it still remained cloaked in the overwhelming uproar; but as he lay there he seemed to read in the columns of the London papers what all the Folletts were so soon to read — because of him: —

"His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to award the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned officers, non-commissioned officers and men: —

"Sec. Lt. Marmaduke Everard Follett. For most conspicuous bravery.

"He was directed with 50 men to drive the enemy from their trench and under intense shell- and machine-gun fire he personally led three separate parties of bombers against a captured 325 yards of trench; attacking the machine gun, shooting the firer with his revolver, and destroying gun and *personnel* with bombs. This very brave act saved many lives and ensured the success of the attack. In carrying one of his men back to safety Sec. Lt. Follett was mortally wounded."

He felt himself smile, as he soberly spaced it out, to remember that the youths at the office used to call him Marmalade. It was curious that he most felt his present and his present transfigured self, when he thought of Cauldwell's office, where so

many years of his past had been spent. When he thought of that, of the jocund youths, of the weary hours and wasted years, it was to feel himself transfigured; when he thought of the Folletts and of Channerley, to feel that he matched them; to feel at last as if he had come home. What to the grimy, everyday world counted as transfiguration, counted as the normal, the expected, to the world of Channerley.

He wondered, lying there and looking out past the daffodils, where Victoria was; he had heard that she was nursing, too, somewhere in France; and again, as he had smiled over the contrast of "Sec. Lt. Marmaduke Everard Follett" and the "Marmalade" of Cauldwell's office, he smiled in thinking of the difference between Victoria and the nice young nurse who, for all her resembling curve of hair, was also second-rate. It would have been very wonderful to have been nursed by Victoria, and yet his thought turned from that. There had never been any sweetness, never even any kindness for him, in Victoria's clear young gaze; when it came to nursing, he could imagine her being kind to a Tommy, but not to him, the dull, submerged cousin; and the nice though second-rate nurse was very kind. He would rather die under her eyes than under Victoria's.

And he would rather think of Victoria as he had last seen her at the big London dance to which, most unexpectedly, he had found himself asked last spring — the spring before the war. He had decided, as with nervous fingers he tied his white cravat, — how rarely disturbed had been that neat sheaf lying in his upper drawer! — that he must have been confused with some other Follett, for he

was so seldom asked anywhere, where he would be likely to meet Victoria. However, it was a delight to see her in her snowy dress, her beautiful hair bound with silver, and to feel, as he watched her dancing, that she belonged, in a sense, to him; for he, too, was a Follett.

How much more did she belong to him now! And not only Victoria, but all of them, these Folletts of his and the Folletts of past generations; and Channerley, centre of all his aching, wistful memories. It had been for him, always, part of the very structure of his nature, that beautiful old house where he had spent his boyhood. Perhaps it was because he had been turned out of the nest so early that he never ceased to miss it. His thought, like a maimed fledgling, had fluttered round and round it, longing, exiled, helpless.

If, now, he could have survived, his eldest brother, he felt sure, must have asked him oftener to stay at Channerley. It still gave him a pang, or, rather, the memory of many pangs, to recall that Robert had not asked him for two years, and had seemed to forget all about him after that. They had all seemed to forget about him, — that was the trouble of it, — and almost from the very beginning: Robert, who had Channerley; Austin, who had gone into the army and was now in Mesopotamia; Griselda, married so splendidly up in her northern estate; and Amy, the artistic bachelor-girl of the family, whom he associated with irony and cigarette-smoke and prolonged absences in Paris. Even cheerful Sylvia, of South Kensington, with her many babies and K.C. husband, whom he always thought of, for all her well-being, as very nearly as submerged as himself, — even

Sylvia saw little of him and asked him only to family dinners, — Mr. Shillington's family, not hers, — at depressingly punctual intervals.

But Sylvia, the one nearest him in years, was the one who had forgotten least, and she had, after her fashion, done her best for him. Confused at study, clumsy at games, shy and tongue-tied, he had not in any way distinguished himself at a rather second-rate public school; and to distinguish himself had been the only hope for him. The Folletts had never had any money to spare, and Eton and Oxford for Robert and Sandhurst for Austin fulfilled a tradition that became detached and terse where younger sons who could not distinguish themselves were concerned. Still, he had always felt that, had his father lived, something better would have been found for him than to be bundled, through the instrumentality of Mr. Shillington, into a solicitor's office. There he had been bundled, and there he had stuck for all these years, as clumsy, as confused as ever; a pallid, insignificant little fellow (oh, he had no illusions about himself!) with the yellow hair and small yellow moustache which, together with his name, had earned for him his sobriquet.

They had not disliked him, those direfully facetious companions of his. *Noblesse oblige* was an integral part of his conception of himself, however little they might be aware of his unvarying courtesy towards them as its exercise. He suspected that they thought of him as merely inoffensive and rather piteous; but shyness might give that impression; they could not guess at the quiet aversion that it covered. He was aware sometimes, suddenly, that in the aloofness and contemplative disdain of his pale sidelong glance at them,

he most felt himself a Follett. If his mind, for most practical purposes, was slow and clumsy, it was sharp and swift in its perceptions. He judged the young men in Cauldwell's office as a Follett must judge them. In the accurate applying of that standard he was as instinctively gifted as any of his race; and if he knew, from his first look at her, that the nice young nurse was second-rate, how coldly and calmly, all these years, he had known that the young men who called him Marmalade were third-rate. And yet they none of them disliked him, and he wondered whether it was because, when he most felt disdain, he most looked merely timid, or because they recognized in him, all dimly as it might be, the first-rateness that was his inherently and inalienably.

Just as the third-rate young men might recognize the first-rate but dimly, he was aware that to the world the Folletts, too, were not important. It was not one of the names, in spite of centuries of local lustre, to conjure with; and he liked it all the better because of that. They had never, it was true, distinguished themselves; but they were people of distinction, and that was, to his quiet, reflective, savouring, an even higher state. He sometimes wondered if, in any of them, the centring of family consciousness was as intense as in himself. If they were aloof about third-rate people, it was not because they were really very conscious about themselves. They took themselves for granted, as they took Channerley and the family history; and only Amy was aware that some of the family portraits were good.

The history — it was not of course accurate to call it that, yet it seemed more spacious and signifi-

cant than mere annals — pored over during long evenings, in faded parchments, deeds, and letters, was known in every least detail to him. How the Folletts had begun, very soberly but very decorously, in the fifteenth century, and how they had gone on: rooting more deeply into their pleasant woodlands and meadows; flowering, down the centuries, now in a type of grace — that charming Antonia who had married so well at James the First's court; and of gallantry — a Follett had fallen at Naseby, and a Follett had fought at Waterloo; or of good-humoured efficiency, as in the eighteenth-century judge and the nineteenth-century bishop. And he, who was neither graceful nor gallant nor good-humoured (sour and sad he felt himself), never could resist the warming, revivifying influence of these recognitions, stretching himself, sighing, smiling happily before his Bloomsbury fire on a winter's evening, as he laid down the thick pile of yellowed manuscripts to think it all over and feel himself, in spite of everything, a link with it all.

Robert had always been very decent about letting him have and keep the documents for as long as he liked.

It was strange to think that he was never to see his Bloomsbury lodgings again, and stranger, really, that a certain tinge of regret was in the thought; for how, for years, he had hated them, place of exile, of relegation, as he had always felt them! Yet he had come to be fond of his little sitting-room, just because, to his eye, with its mingled comfort and austerity, it was so significant of exile. If a Follett could n't have what he wanted, that was all he would have — his rack of pipes, his shelves of books, his little collection of

mostly marginless mezzotints ranged along the dark, green walls. The room was a refuge and did not pretend to be an achievement, and in that very fact might, to an eye as sharp as his for such significance, suggest the tastes that it relinquished. He had indeed all the tastes and none of the satisfactions of Channerley.

There it was; he had come back to it again, as, indeed, he had, in spirit, never left it — never for a moment. He felt himself, lying there in the hospital on the French coast, with the soft spring sea lapping upon the beach under his window — he felt himself drop, drop, softly, sweetly, deeply, back to his childhood. From his high nursery-window he saw the dewy tree-tops, — the old hawthorn that grew so near the house, and the old mulberry, — and the rooks wheeling on a spring sky so many years ago. The dogs, at that early hour, just released, might be racing over the lawns: idle, jovial Peter, the spaniel, and Jack, the plucky, hot-tempered little Dandy-Dinmont.

Below the lawns were the high grey garden walls, and above, rising a little from the flagged rose-garden, were the woods where the daffodils grew, daffodils like those beside him now, tall and small, their pale, bright pennons set among warrior spears of green. Little bands of them ran out upon the lawn from under the great trees, and one saw their gold glimmering far, far along the woodlands. Oh, the beauty of it, and the stillness; the age and youth; the smile and the security! How he had always loved it, shambling about the woods and gardens; creeping rather — he always saw himself as creeping somehow — about the dear, gay, faded house! Always such an awkward, in-

significant little boy; even his dear old Nanna had felt dissatisfied with his appearance, and he had always known it, when she sent him down with the others to the drawing-room; and his mother, she had made it very apparent, had found him only that.

He shrank from the thought of his mother; perhaps it was because of her, of her vexed and averted eyes, her silken rustle of indifference as she passed him by, that he saw himself as creeping anywhere where she might come. He only remembered her in glimpses: languidly and ironically smiling at her tea-table (Amy had her smile), the artificial tone of her voice had even then struck his boyish ear; reading on a summer afternoon, with bored brows and dissatisfied lips, as she lay on a garden chair in the shade of the mulberry tree; querulously arguing with his father, who, good-humoured and very indifferent, strolled about the hall in his pink coat on a winter morning, waiting for the horses to be brought round; his mother's yellow braids shining under her neatly tilted riding-hat, her booted foot held to the blaze of the great log-fire. A hard, selfish, sentimental woman; and — was n't it really the only word for what he felt in her? — just a little shoddy. He distinguished it from the second-rate nicely: it was a more personal matter; for his mother, though certainly not a Follett, was of good stock; he knew, of course, all about her stock. It always grieved him to think that it was from her he had his yellow hair and the pale grey of his eyes; his stature, too, for she had been a small woman; all the other Folletts were tall; but she had given him nothing more: not a trace of her beauty was his, and he was glad of it.

It was curious, since he had really had so little to do with him, as little, almost, as with his mother, how blissfully his sense of his father's presence pervaded his childish memories. He was so kind. The kindest thing he remembered at Channerley, except his dear old Nanna and Peter the spaniel. It used to give him a thrill of purest joy when, meeting him, his father, his hands clasped behind his back after his strolling wont, would stop and bend amused and affectionate eyes upon him; rather the eyes, to be sure, that he bent upon his dogs; but Marmaduke always felt of him that he looked upon his children, and upon himself, too, as parts of the pack; and it was delightful to be one of the pack, with him.

"Well, old fellow, and how goes the world with you to-day?" his father would say.

And after that question the world would go in sunshine.

He had always believed that, had his father lived, he would never have been so forgotten; just as he had always believed that his father would never have allowed one of his pack to be bundled into the solicitor's office. For that he had to thank, he felt sure, not only Sylvia's negative solicitude, but his mother's active indifference. Between them both they had done it to him.

And he never felt so to the full his dispossession as in thinking of Robert. He had always intensely feared and admired Robert. He did not know what he feared, for Robert was never unkind. But Robert was everything that he was not: tall and gay and competent, and possessing everything needful, from the very beginning, for the perfect fulfilment of his type. The difference between them had been

far more than the ten years that had made of Robert a man when he was still only a little boy. There had been, after all, a time when they had been a very big and a very little boy together, with Austin in between; yet the link had seemed always to break down after Austin. Robert, in this retrospect, had always the air of strolling away from him — for Robert, too, was a stroller. Not that he himself had had the air of pursuit; he had never, he felt sure, from the earliest age, lacked tact; tact and reticence and self-effacement had been bred into him. But his relationship with Robert had seemed always to consist in standing there, hiding ruefulness, and gazing at Robert's strolling back.

The difference from Austin had perhaps been as great, but it had never hurt so much, for Austin, though with his share of the Follett charm, had never had the charm of Robert. A clear-voiced and clear-eyed, masterful boy, Austin's main contact with others was in doing things with them, and that sort of contact did not mean congeniality. Austin had made use of him; had let him hold his ferrets and field for him at cricket; and a person whom you found useful did not, for the time being, bore you.

But he had bored Robert always — that was apparent; and beautiful Griselda, who was older than either of them, and Amy, who was younger. Griselda had gazed rather sadly over his head; and Amy had smiled and teased him so that he had seldom ventured on a remark in her presence. Even fat little Sylvia, the baby, had always preferred any of the others to him as she grew up; had only not been bored because, while she was good-humoured, she was also rather dull. And at the bottom of his

heart, rueful always, sore, and still patiently surprised, he knew that, while he found them all a little brutal, he could not admire them the less because of it. It was part of the Follett inheritance to be able to be brutal, unconsciously, and therefore with no loss of bloom.

And now, at last, he was not to bore them any longer; at last, he was not to be forgotten. How could he not be happy, — it brought back every blissful thrill of boyhood, his father's smile, the daffodil woods in spring, heightened to ecstasy,— when he had at last made of himself one of the Folletts who were remembered? He would have his place in the history beside the Follett who fell at Naseby. No family but is glad of a V.C. in its annals. They could no longer stroll away. They would be proud of him; he had done something for all the Folletts forever.

II

The nice young nurse came in. She closed the door gently, and, with her smile, calm before accustomed death, and always, as it were, a little proud of him, — that was because they were both English, — she took his wrist and felt his pulse, holding her watch in the other hand, and asked him, presently, how he felt. Only after that did she say, contemplating him for a moment, — Marmaduke wondered how many hours — or was it perhaps days? — she was giving him to live, —

"A gentleman has come to see you. You may see him if you like. But I've told him that he is only to stay for half an hour."

The blood flowed up to Marmaduke's forehead.

He felt it beating hard in his neck and behind his ears, and his heart thumped down there under the neatly drawn bed-clothes.

"A gentleman? What's his name?"

Was it Robert?

"Here is his card," said the nurse.

She drew it from her pocket and gave it to him. It could n't have been Robert, of course. Robert would only have had to come up. Yet he was dizzy with the disappointment. It was as if he saw Robert strolling away for the last time. He would never see Robert again.

Mr. Guy Thorpe was the name. The address was a London club that Marmaduke placed at once as second-rate, and "The Beeches, Arlington Road," in a London suburb. On the card was written in a neat scholarly hand: "May I see you? We are friends."

It was difficult for a moment to feel anything but the receding tide of his hope. The next thing that came was a sense of dislike for Mr. Guy Thorpe and for the words that he had written. Friends? By what right since he did not know his name?

"Is he a soldier?" he asked. "How did he come? I don't know him."

"You need n't see him unless you want to," said the nurse. "No; he's not a soldier. An elderly man. He's driving a motor for the French Wounded Emergency Fund, and came on from the Alliance because he heard that you were here. Perhaps he's some old family friend. He spoke as if he were."

Marmaduke smiled a little. "That's hardly likely. But I'll see him, yes; since he came for that."

When she had gone, he lay looking again at the

blue bands across the window. A flock of sea-gulls flew past — proud, swift, and leisurely, glittering in the sun. They seemed to embody the spendour and exultation of his thoughts, and, when they had disappeared, he was sorry, almost desolate.

Mr. Guy Thorpe. He took up the card again in his feeble hand and looked at it. And now, dimly, it seemed to remind him of something.

Steps approached along the passage, the nurse's light footfall and the heavier, careful tread of a man. An oddly polite, almost a deprecating tread. He had gone about a great many hospitals and was cautious not to disturb wounded men. Yet Marmaduke felt again that he did not like Mr. Guy Thorpe, and, as they came in, he was conscious of feeling a little frightened.

There was nothing to frighten one in Mr. Thorpe's appearance. He was a tall, thin, ageing man, travel-worn, in civilian clothes, with a dingy Red-Cross badge on the sleeve of his waterproof overcoat. Baldish and apparently near-sighted, he seemed to blink towards the bed, and, as if with motoring in the wind, his eyelids were moist and reddened. He sat down, murmuring some words of thanks to the nurse.

A very insignificant man, for all his height and his big forehead. Altogether of The Beeches, Arlington Road. Had he turned grey, he might have looked less shabby, but dark thin locks still clustered above his high crown and behind his long-lobed ears. His eyes were dark, his moustache drooped, and he had a small, straight nose. Marmaduke saw that he was the sort of man who, in youth, might have been considered very handsome. He looked like a seedy poet and some sort of minor

civil servant mingled, the civil servant having got the better of the poet. Marmaduke also imagined that he would have a large family and a harassed but ambitious wife, with a genteel accent — a wife a little below himself. His tie was of a dull red silk. Marmaduke did not like him.

Mr. Thorpe glanced round, as if cautiously, to see if the nurse had closed the door, and then, it was really as if more cautiously still, looked at Marmaduke, slightly moving back his chair.

"I'm very grateful to you, very grateful indeed," he said in a low voice, "for seeing me."

"You've come a long way," said Marmaduke.

"Yes. A long way. I had heard of your being here. I hoped to get here. I felt that I must see you. We are all proud of you; more proud than I can say."

He looked down now at the motoring-cap he held, and Marmaduke became aware that the reddened eyes were still more suffused and that the mouth under the drooping moustache twitched and trembled. He could think of nothing to say, except to murmur something about being very glad — though he did n't want to say that; and he supposed, to account for Mr. Thorpe's emotion, that he must be a moving sight, lying there, wasted, bandaged, and dying.

"You don't remember my name, I suppose," said Mr. Thorpe after a moment, in which he frankly got out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes.

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Marmaduke very politely. He was glad to say this. It was the sort of thing he did want to say.

"Yet I know yours very, very well," said Mr. Thorpe, with a curious watery smile. "I lived at

Channerley once. I was tutor there for some time — to Robert, your brother, and Griselda. Yes," Mr. Thorpe nodded, "I know the Folletts well; and Channerley, the dear old place."

Now the dim something in memory pressed forward, almost with a physical advance, and revealed itself as sundry words scratched on the schoolroom window-panes and sundry succinct drawings in battered old Greek and Latin grammars. Robert had always been very clever at drawing, catching with equal facility and accuracy the swiftness of a galloping horse and the absurdities of a human profile. What returned to Marmaduke now, and as clearly as if he had the fly-leaf before him, was a tiny thumb-nail sketch of such a galloping horse unseating a lank, crouching figure, of whom the main indications were the angles of acute uncertainty taken by the knees and elbows; and a more elaborate portrait, dashed and dotted as if with a ruthless boyish grin — such an erect and melancholy head it was, so dark the tossed-back locks, so classical the nose and unclassical the moustache, and a brooding eye indicated in a triangular sweep of shadow. Beneath was written in Robert's clear, boyish hand, "Mr. Guy Thorpe, Poet, Philosopher, and Friend. Vale." Even the date flashed before him, 1880; and with it — strange, inappropriate association — the daffodils running out upon the lawn, as no doubt he had seen them as he leaned from the schoolroom window, with the Greek grammar under his elbow on the sill.

So that was it. Mr. Guy Thorpe, placed, explained, disposed of — poor dear! He felt suddenly quite kindly towards him, quite touched by his act of loyalty to the old allegiance in coming; and

flattered, too, — yes, even by Mr. Thorpe, — that he should be recognized as a Follett who had done something for the name; and smiling very benevolently upon him, he said: —

"Oh, of course; I remember perfectly now — your name, and drawings of you in old schoolbooks, you know. All tutors and governesses get those tributes from their pupils, don't they? But I myself could n't remember, could I? for it was before I was born that you were at Channerley."

There was a moment of silence after this, and in it Marmaduke felt that Mr. Thorpe did not like being so placed. He had no doubt imagined that there would be less ambiguous tributes, and that his old pupils would have talked of him to the younger generation.

And something of this chagrin certainly came out in his next words as, nodding and looking round at the daffodils, he said: —

"Yes, yes. Quite true. No, of course you could n't yourself remember. I was more though, I think I may fairly say, than the usual tutor or governess. I came, rather, at Sir Robert's instance." — Sir Robert was Marmaduke's father. — "We had met, made friends, at Oxford; his former tutor there was an uncle of mine, and Sir Robert, in my undergraduate days, used to visit him sometimes. He was very keen on getting me to come. Young Robert wanted something of a firm hand. I was the friend rather than the mere man of books in the family."

"Poet, Philosopher and Friend" — Marmaduke had it almost on his lips, and almost with a laugh, his benevolence deepened for poor Mr. Thorpe, so self-revealed, so entirely Robert's portrait of him.

Amusing to think that even the quite immature first-rate can so relegate the third. But perhaps it was a little unfair to call poor Mr. Thorpe third. The Folletts would not be likely to choose a third-rate man for a tutor; second was kinder, and truer. He had, obviously, come down in the world.

"I see. It's natural I never heard, though: there's such a chasm between the elders and the youngers in a big family, is n't there?" he said. "Griselda is twelve years older than I am, and Robert ten, you remember. She was married by the time I began my Greek. You never came back to Channerley, did you? I hope things have gone well with you since those days?"

He questioned, wanting to be very kind; wanting to give something of the genial impression of his father smiling, with his "And how goes the world with you to-day?" But he saw that, while Mr. Thorpe's evident emotion deepened, it was with a sense of present grief as well as of retrospective pathos.

"No; I never came, — that is —. No; I passed by: I never came to stay. I went abroad; I travelled, with a pupil, for some years before my marriage." Grief and confusion were oddly mingled in his drooping face. "And after that — life had changed too much. My dear old friend Sir Robert had died. I could not have faced it all. No, no; when some chapters are read, it is better to close the book; better to close the book. But I have never forgotten Channerley, nor the Folletts of Channerley; that will always remain for me the golden page; the page," said Mr. Thorpe, glancing round again at the daffodils, "of friendship, of youth, of daffodils in springtime. I saw you there," he

added suddenly, "once, when you were a very little lad. I saw you. I was passing by; bicycling; no time to stop. You remember the high road skirts the woods to the north. I came and looked over the wall; and there you were — in your holland pinafore and white socks — digging up the daffodils and putting them into your little red-and-yellow cart. A beautiful spring morning. The woods full of sunshine. You would n't remember."

But he did remember — perfectly. Not having been seen; but the day; the woods; the daffodils. He had dug them up to plant in his own little garden, down below. He had always been stupid with his garden; had always failed where the other succeeded. And he had wanted to be sure of daffodils. And they had all laughed at him for wanting the wild daffodils like that for himself, and for going to get them in the wood. And why had Mr. Thorpe looked over the wall and not come in? He hated to think that he had been watched on that spring morning — hated it. And, curiously, that sense of fear with which he had heard the approaching footsteps returned to him. It frightened him that Mr. Thorpe had watched him over the wall.

His distaste and shrinking were perhaps apparent in his face, for it was with a change of tone and hastiness of utterance, as though hurrying away from something, that Mr. Thorpe went on: —

"You see, — it's been my romance, always, Channerley — and all of you. I've always followed your lives — always — from a distance — known what you were up to. I've made excuses to myself — in the days when I used to go a good deal about the country — to pass by Channerley and just have a glimpse of you. And when I heard that

you had done this noble deed, — when I heard what you had done for England, for Channerley, for us all, — I felt I had to come and see you. You must forgive me if I seem a mere intruder. I can't seem that to myself. I've cared too much. And what I came for, really, was to thank you, — to thank you, my dear boy, — and to tell you that because of you, life must be nobler, always, for all of us."

His words had effaced the silly, groping fear. It was indeed, since his colonel's visit, the first congratulation he had had from the outer world. The nurses, of course, had congratulated him, and the surgeons; but no one who knew him outside; the kindly telegrams from Robert and Sylvia did not count as congratulations. And in a way poor Mr. Thorpe did know him, and though it was only from him, it had its sweetness. He felt himself flush as he answered, "That's very kind of you."

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Thorpe, shaking his head and swinging his foot — Marmaduke knew that from the queer movement of his body as he sat with very tightly folded arms. "Not kind! That's not the word — from us to you! Not the word at all!"

"I'm very happy, as you may imagine," said Marmaduke. And he was happy again, and glad to share his happiness with poor Mr. Thorpe. "It makes everything worth while, does n't it, to have brought it off at all?"

"Everything, everything — it would; it would, to you. So heroes feel," said Mr. Thorpe. "To give your life for England. I know it all — in every detail. Yes, you are happy in dying that England may live. Brave boy! Splendid boy!"

Now he was weeping. He had out his handker-

chief and his shoulders shook. It made Marmaduke want to cry, too, and he wondered confusedly if the nurse would soon come back. Had not the half hour passed?

"Really — it's too good of you. You must n't, you know; you must n't," he murmured, while the word, "boy — boy," repeated, made tangled images in his mind, and he saw himself in the white socks and with the little red-and-yellow cart, and then as he had been the other day, leading his men, his revolver in his hand and the bullets flying about him. "And I'm not a boy," he said; "I'm thirty-four; absurdly old to be only a second lieutenant. And there are so many of us. Why," — the thought came fantastically, but he seized it, because Mr. Thorpe was crying so and he must seize something, — "we're as common as daffodils!"

"Ah! not for me! not for me!" Mr. Thorpe gulped quickly. Something had given way in him — as if the word "daffodils" had pressed a spring. He was sobbing aloud, and he had fallen on his knees by the bed and put up his hand for Marmaduke's. "I cannot keep it from you! Not at this last hour! Not when you are leaving me forever! — My son! My brave son! I am your father, Marmaduke! I am your father, my dear, dear boy!"

III

It was the stillest room. The two calm bands of blue crossed the window. In the sunlight the gulls came flying back. Marmaduke looked out at them. Were they the same sea-gulls or another flock? Then quietly he closed his eyes. Stillness — calm. But something else was rising to him from

them. Darkness; darkness; a darkness worse than death. Oh! death was sweet compared to this. Compared to this all his life had been sweet; and something far dearer than life was being taken from him. He only knew the terrible confusion of his whole nature.

He opened his eyes again with an instinct of escape. There were the bands of blue, and, still passing in their multitudes, leaving him forever, the proud, exultant sea-gulls. The man still knelt beside him. He heard his own voice come: —

"What do you mean?"

"I never meant to tell you! I never meant to tell you!" a moan answered him. "But — seeing you lying there! — dying! — my son! — who has given his life for England! — And how I have longed for you all these years! — My romance, Marmaduke — How could I be silent? Forgive me! Forgive me, my boy. Yes, mine. My known children are dear to me, but how far dearer the unknown son, seen only by stealth, in snatched glimpses! It is true, Marmaduke, true. We were lovers. She loved me. Do not ask. Do not question. We were young. She was very beautiful. It was springtime; daffodils were in the woods. She said that she had never known any one like me. She said that her life was hollow, meaningless. I opened doors to her, I read to her. Browning — I read Browning," he muttered on, "in the woods; among the daffodils. It was a new life to her — and to me. And we were swept away. Don't blame us, Marmaduke. If there was wrong, there was great beauty — then. Only then; for after, she was cruel — very cruel. She turned from me; she crushed and tore my heart. Oh! — I have suffered!

But no one knew. No one ever dreamed of it. Only she and I. My God! — I see her in your hair and eyes!"

It was true. It was absolutely true. Through his whole being he felt its inevitability. Everything was clear, with a strange, black, infernal clearness. His life lay open before him, open from beginning to end: that beginning of tawdry sentiment and shame — with daffodils; and this end, with daffodils again, and again with tawdry sentiment and shame.

He was not a Follett. He had no part in the Folletts. He had no part in Channerley. He was an interloper, a thief. He was the son of this wretched man, in whose very grief he could detect the satisfaction — oh, who more fitted to detect such satisfaction! — of his claim upon a status above his own. He was all that he had always most despised, a second-rate, a third-rate little creature; the anxious, civil, shrinking Marmalade of Cauldwell's office. Why (as the hideous moments led him on, point by point, his old lucidity, sharpened to a needle fineness, seemed to etch the truth in lines of fire upon the blackness), had n't he always been a pitiful little snob? Was n't it of the essence of a snob to over-value the things one had n't and to fear the things one was? It had n't been other people, it had been himself, what he really was, of whom he had always been afraid. He saw himself reduced to the heretofore unrecognized, yet always operative, element in his own nature — a timid, watchful humility.

Oh, Channerley! Channerley! The wail rose in his heart and it filled the world. Oh, his woods, his daffodils, his father's smile — gone — lost forever! Worse than that — smirched, withered, desecrated!

A hideous gibbering of laughter seemed to rise around him, and pointing fingers. Amy's eyes passed with another malice in their mockery; and Robert would never turn to him now, and Griselda would never look at him. He saw it all, as they would never see it. He was not one of them, and they had always felt it; and oh, — above all, — he had always felt it. And now, quite close it seemed, softly rustling, falsely smiling, moved his loathsome mother: not only as he remembered her in youth, but in her elegant middle years, as he had last seen her, with hard eyes and alien lips and air of brittle, untouched exquisiteness.

Suddenly fury so mounted in him that he saw himself rising in bed, rending his dressings, to seize the kneeling man by the throat and throttle him. He could see his fingers sinking in on either side among the clustered hair, and hear himself say, "How dare you! How dare you! You hound! You snivelling, sneaking hound! You look for pity from me, do you! — and tenderness! Well, take this, this! Everything, everything I am and have that's worth being and having, I owe to them. I've hated you and all you mean, always — yes, your fear and your caution and your admiration and your great high forehead. Oh, I see it! I see it! — it's my own! And though I am only that in myself, then take it from me that I hate myself along with you and curse myself with you!"

It came to him that he was slowly panting, and that after the fever-fury an icy chill crept over him. And a slow, cold smile came with it, and he saw Jephson, the wit of the office, wagging his head and saying, "Little Marmalade take a man by the throat! Ask me another!"

No; little Marmalade might win the V.C.; but only when he thought he was a Follett. Was that what it all came to, really? Something broke and stopped in his mind.

He heard his father's voice. How long ago it had all happened. He had known for years, had n't he, that this was his father?

"Marmaduke! Mr. Follett! What have I done? Shall I call somebody? Oh, forgive me!"

His father was standing now beside him and bending over him. He looked up at him and shook his head. He did not want any one to come.

"Oh, what have I done?" the man repeated.

"I was dying anyway, you know," he heard himself say.

What a pitiful face it was, this weary, loosened, futureless old face above him! What a frightened face! What long years of slow disgarnishing lay behind it: youth, romance, high hopes, all dropped away. He had come to-day with their last vestiges, still the sentimental, romancing fool, self-centred and craving; but nothing of that was left. He was beaten, at last, down into the very ground. It was a haggard, humiliated, frightened face, and miserable. As he himself had been. But not even death lay before this face. For how many years must it go on sinking down until the earth covered it? Marmaduke seemed to understand all about him, as well as if he had been himself.

"Sit down," he said. He heard that his voice was gentle, though he was not aware of feeling anything, only of understanding. "I was rather upset. No; I don't want any one. Of course I forgive you. Don't bother about it, I beg."

His father sat down, keeping his swollen eyes on

the motoring-cap which, unseeingly, he turned and turned in his hands.

"Tell me about yourself a little," said Marmaduke, with slow, spaced breaths. "Where do you live? How? Are you fairly happy?"

He knew that he was not happy; but he might, like most people with whom life had not succeeded, often imagine himself so, and Marmaduke wanted to help him, if possible, to imagine it.

"I live near London. I used to do a good deal of University Extension lecturing. I've a clerkship in the Education Office now." Mr. Thorpe spoke in a dead obedient voice. "A small salary, not much hope of advance; and I've a large family. It's rather up-hill, of course. But I've good children; clever children. My eldest boy's at Oxford; he took a scholarship at Westminster; and my eldest girl's at Girton. The second girl, Winnie, has a very marked gift for painting; she is our artist; we're going to send her to the Slade next year when she leaves the High School. Good children. I've nothing to complain of."

"So you're fairly happy?" Marmaduke repeated. Oddly, he felt himself comforted in hearing about the good and happy children, in hearing about Winnie, her father's favourite.

"Happy? Well, just now, with this terrible war, one can't be that, can one? It is a great adventure for me, however, this work of mine, motoring about France. I don't think I've ever done anything I cared so much about since — for years," said Mr. Thorpe. "It's a beautiful country, is n't it? and the soldiers are such splendid fellows! One gets a lot out of it. But happy? No, I don't suppose I am. I'm pretty much of a failure, and

I started life with great imaginings about myself. One does n't get over that sort of disappointment; one never really gets over it in a way." Mr. Thorpe was looking at him now, and it was as if there were a kindliness between them. "Things have been rather grey and disagreeable on the whole," he said.

"They can be very grey and disagreeable, can't they?" said Marmaduke, closing his eyes.

He was very tired, and as he lay there quietly, having nothing further to know or to suffer, having reached the very limits of conscious dissolution, something else began to come to him. It seemed born of the abolition of self and of the acceptance of the fact that he was dead to all that had given life worth or beauty. It would have been very good to be a Follett; though, he saw it now, he had over-prized that special sort of goodness — with so much else from which he had been, as really, shut out; but he was not a Follett; nor was he merely this poor, insignificant father. He did not quite make out in what the difference lay and he did not rejoice in it, for there was no rejoicing left in him. But, even if the difference were only an acquired instinct (dimly, the terms of his complacent readings in biology and sociology returned to him), even if it were only that, not anything inherent and transmissible, it was, all the same, his own possession; something that he and the Folletts had made together; so that it was as true to say that he had won the V.C. as to say that they had. The lessened self that was left to him had still its worth. To see the truth, even if it undid you, was worthy; to see so unwaveringly that it was good to be a Follett even when you were n't one, had

the elements of magnanimity; and to accept the fact of being second-rate proved, did it not? — if you still cared to prove it; he felt himself smile as gently at the relinquished self as he had smiled at his father, — that you were not merely second-rate.

There was now a sound of stumbling movement; doors opening and shutting; nurses, surgeons in the room; and his father's face, far away, against the blue bands, looking at him, still so frightened and so miserable that he tried again to smile at him and to say, "It's all right. Quite all right."

At all events he had been decent to the poor old fellow. His thoughts came brokenly, but he was still seeing something, finding something; it was like a soft light growing. At all events, he had behaved as a Follett would wish to behave even when brought to such a pass. No — but it was n't quite that, either; it was something new. He had behaved as any one decent should wish to behave. And the daffodils glimmering to his vision seemed to light him further still. "We are as common as daffodils," came back to him. Daffodils were for everybody. Foolish little boy who, on the distant spring morning in the woods of Channerley, dug them up to take them to his own garden!

He was there among them with his little red-and-yellow cart, and the thrush was singing high above him, in the rosy topmost branches of an elm.

Beautiful woods. Beautiful flowers of light and chivalry. How the sunshine streamed among them!

"Dear Channerley," he thought. For again he seemed to belong there.

Gentle hands were tending him and, as he turned

his cheek on the pillow, it was with the comfort — almost that of the little boy at Channerley being tucked up in the warm nursery to go to sleep — of knowing that he was dying, and that, in spite of everything, he had given something to the name.

PANSIES

I

"OF course it is a horrid little garden, but one gets so fond of one's own things, even when they are horrid," said Miss Edith Glover, with her gentle deprecatory laugh.

She stood with her friend at the door of the conservatory that led from the sitting-room to the oblong plot of garden — a small, middle-aged woman, with soft brown eyes, and hair the colour of a faded leaf; her wasted throat and transparent temples and faint yet feverish flush marking her already with menacing symptoms.

The conservatory was of the sort that crops out irrelevantly at the back of the many suburban houses, like glaucous fungi; but in Miss Glover's little establishment, its shelves filled with neatly ranged boxes of seedlings, with bundles of raffia, tidy baskets, and carefully garnered labels, it was completely utilitarian, with never a fern or begonia to recall its usual state. Miss Glover's house was suburban, or nearly so, for though it stood in secure detachment from other villas on the southern slopes of a small Surrey town, the town, on its northern side, spread into ugly patches of red brick that devoured the woods and fields and

ran long tentacles almost up to London. Acacia Road was removed from this peril of vitality, and its upper windows looked over pleasant stretches of untouched hill and meadow.

The Nook had been left to Miss Glover by an aunt five years ago, and to her it was, from its porch before to its garden behind, a paradise pure and simple, though she described her garden now, in showing it to Florrie Lennard, so disparagingly. If she called it horrid, however, it was only because, with her strong sense of other people's claims and opinions, she recognized that to Florrie, accustomed to grand week-ends at big country-places, it must, *qua* garden, look very dim and meagre. That it must also look, in its humility, very lovely, she took for granted.

Mrs. Lennard, however, standing with her on the conservatory step, her robust silken arm protectingly and benevolently laid within hers, did not contradict her, though her cheerful eyes roamed kindly over the borders of pansies, the beds of mignonette, and the clumps of sweet peas in the corners; but her kindness was for her friend rather than for the garden, and she said, "You have n't had strength, I expect, for doing more with it."

"I've never had much strength," said Miss Glover. "It does n't want much hard work, luckily. The pansies go on from year to year and only need dividing in the autumn, and then there are the bulbs, of course, in spring; I have crocuses and daffodils and narcissi and some beautiful tulips. The rest I do with penny packets. All those sweet peas and all that mignonette came from two penny packets."

"You can't expect much for a penny, can you?"

said Mrs. Lennard with her rather jovial air; and now she stepped down onto the narrow strip of lawn that had a bird-bath sunken in the middle and a rose-bush at each corner, of the kind now seldom seen, known as Prince Charlie or Maiden's Blush — dark and small of foliage, with flat flowers that would be snowy were they not tinged with a cold pink. They always made Miss Glover think of an old Scotch ballad. Their flowering season was over, now, however. The old Pyrus japonica that grew against the wall was also, long since, over, though its fresh, vigorous green embossed the dull bricks; but on the wall opposite, a Madame Alfred Carrière was throwing out a second blooming, dreamy, melancholy and romantic as only she could be. Madame Alfred Carrière made Miss Glover think of a Chopin waltz, and she hoped that Florrie might at all events remark favourably on her abundance. But Florrie hardly glanced at her. Pausing, as they paced the lawn, to look with tolerant interest at the bird-bath, she observed,

"I've just been staying with the Isaacsons in Hertfordshire. Such a lovely place. They've a broad sanded walk leading from the house to the rose-garden, as long as — well, to the end of this road, and it's arched with roses all the way, a regular roof of roses, the latest climbers; I never saw such a sight. And their herbaceous border, even now, is a blaze of colour. I wish you could see it. It would do you good. It did *me* good, I know. I told Mrs. Isaacson I always feel a better woman after a week-end in her garden. Flowers mean so much to me. I can't get on without them. I run down to the Isaacsons whenever, as I say to

her, I need an æsthetic cocktail. Of course they've half a dozen gardeners working from dawn till dewy eve. You can do pretty much what you want in the way of gardens when you're as rich as the Isaacsons. What it must have cost them to make that sunken rose-garden! — all flagged between the beds, with a sun-dial, and a fountain in the middle and bowers of roses all about. They terraced the lawns, too, with flights of stone steps leading down one from the other, and great white stone vases on the pilasters simply foaming over, my dear, with pink geraniums. Against the blue sky it's dazzling.

"Such nice people they are, too, the Isaacsons. Di, the eldest girl, is marrying Lord Haymouth next week, you know. People says it's a *mariage de convenance*, of course, for she's to have £50,000 and he's without the proverbial penny. But I happen to know it's a love match: love at first sight; a regular *coup de foudre*. I was with the Isaacsons at Ascot this spring when they met, and I saw in a moment that Di's fate was sealed. Do you remember the big photo of Di in court dress on the piano in the flat? No? Well, I should have thought it could n't have escaped notice. Such a splendid young creature; dark, proud, glowing beauty. I think, when they're young, there's nothing to beat a beautiful Jewess. She has a gorgeous voice, too, Di; could have made her fortune in grand opera. I've given her a gold cigarette-case with her monogram in diamonds and rubies. It nearly broke me; but they've always been simply sweet to me. She's very fond of smoking. Smokes too much, her mother and I tell her, though I'm afraid *I'm* not a very good example to set before the young!"

Mrs. Lennard's face, while she thus spoke, expressed her contentment with the Isaacsons, with herself, the cigarette-case, and life in general. It was large and ruddy and masterful, with aquiline nose and small, jocund mouth creasing to the chin in a deep line that spoke of good nature and ingenuous sensuality; the full throat supported by a high lace collar, well boned up behind the ears; the prominent blue eyes at once bland and beaming. She was tall, of a fine presence, her handsome bosom thickly decorated with turquoise ornaments, her shoes of glittering patent leather; and from her wrist dangled a purse of fringed and woven gold — an offering to her from the proprietor of the lady's paper that, for many years, she had edited with so much *flair* and ability.

She had made a very good thing of her life, had Mrs. Lennard; and, nearing the fifties as she was, she had amassed a small but secure income and a large number of affluent friends; friends always engaged in vigorous and costly pursuits that involved many rich toilettes, meals to the sound of orchestras in sumptuous restaurants and constant motoring from place to place. Among such friends poor Edie Glover had not counted. She and Mrs. Lennard had been schoolmates in early days when their fortunes, one as the daughter of a poor parson and one of a poor doctor, were equally unpromising. But Florrie had married an ambitious young journalist, typified always, in Miss Glover's memory, from her one rather dazed and shrinking impression of him, by extraordinarily smart mustard-coloured spats and the weighty and imposing seal ring on his finger; and, though early widowed, Florrie had followed along the paths where he had

set her feet with an energy and shrewdness that he could not have bettered.

Meanwhile, poor Edie — for so Mrs. Lennard always thought of her — struggled through many years of waning youth to make her living, and support her mother, as a music-teacher in London. Mrs. Lennard, even when the tides of her own fortune ran low, never lost sight of her. She had always been the kindest of friends, sowing the Glovers' dun-coloured days with "complimentary" theatre or concert tickets and asking them frequently to tea with her at her club. Even after Edie, now alone in the world, had retired to Acacia Road and left youth and London behind her, Mrs. Lennard, who had the air of fully possessing both, kept constantly in touch. She had never before managed, it was true, but for one half hour as she motored by on a winter's day, to visit Acacia Road; but it was to her flat in Victoria Street that Miss Glover always came when called to London by mild necessities or pleasures. Florrie insisted on it; and though, in some ways, Miss Glover would have preferred the house of her cousin in Bayswater, — overflowing with children as it was, and offering only the tiniest of back bedrooms on the top floor, — or the villa of a school-mistress friend at Golder's Green, it had always been impossible to resist Florrie's determined benevolence.

"Nonsense, my dear Edie," she would say. "Your cousin can't want you. You'll only be in the way, with those dozens of children. And as for Golder's Green, what can you see of London from Golder's Green?" (Florrie overlooked the fact that for forty-odd years Miss Glover had done nothing but "see" London.) "You'll be worn out with

tubes and motor-buses if you go to Golder's Green. Whereas with me you are ten minutes from everywhere, be it dentist or dressmaker or concert, and your bedroom's waiting for you — Muriel Lestrange left me only last Monday; and you can't make me believe you'd not rather have your bath in my lovely porcelain tub, with steaming hot water day *and* night, than in one of those awful, antediluvian, blistered monsters, that fold you up like a jack-knife — and the tin of tepid water hauled up four flights by a slavey. I know my London, my dear, through *and* through, and any pleasure here depends upon how you start your day; upon your bath and your breakfast. I can't offer much, but I can offer both of those, A number one."

So she could. Miss Glover could not deny it, though loyally and unheededly murmuring that the villa at Golder's Green had also its bathroom. It could n't, however, compare with Florrie's, all snowy tiles and glittering taps and ranged jars and bottles of salts and scents. Florrie's bathroom seemed to her always to be the very centre and symbol of Florrie's life — modern, invigorating, rejuvenating, at once utilitarian and decorative. It was a sort of brilliant magician's cave from which all the rest radiated: the compact yet so sumptuous little drawing-room with its baby-grand and its palm, its silver-framed photographs, frilled crétonnes, and rose-coloured carpet; the dining-room, even more compact, yet, in its sobriety, as sumptuous — where the breakfasts always, in spite of familiarity, broke upon Miss Glover as revelations of what coffee and rolls and kidneys and bacon could be in the way of strength and heat and crispness; even the pink silk quilt beneath which

she crept at night, and the little maid who brought her early tea, looking, in her fluted caps and aprons, as though she belonged to a theatrical troupe — all seemed emanations of that magic centre where Florrie lay of a morning in hot, scented water and read the paper and smoked a cigarette before emerging armed and panoplied for the avocations and gaieties of the day.

Yet it was not so much Florrie's bathroom and breakfasts, or even Florrie's kindness, that overbore her protests as Florrie's determination, her way of knowing so much better than you yourself could know what was not only good, but happy for you. There was never an answer to be found to her; and though Florrie's flat, with all its sumptuousness, dazed and even tired Miss Glover a little, just as dear Florrie herself sometimes dazed and tired her, she found herself installed there always, feeling her own pursuits, her little tea-parties, her concerts, her timid, bewildered shopping, to be very humdrum and inappropriate as issuing from such a base of operations. The only return she was able to make was to emboss Florrie's sheets and towels and table-linen with beautifully embroidered monograms, and she had always a slight and pleasant sense of being, at all events, a country mouse who had contributed its little offering of grain or honey when she recognized these trophies of her craft on her bed and on the table and in the bathroom.

But the last time she had gone up that summer, only, now, three weeks ago, she had found herself suddenly of a significance almost as great as that of any of Florrie's brilliant friends. To become significant to Florrie one had either to be brilliant or

piteous, and she was piteous. Florrie had gone with her to the doctor's, and it was Florrie, kind Florrie, an arm about her shoulders and a breast spread to her tired head, who had broken to her the verdict.

She was menaced, gravely menaced. — Yes; it did not surprise her — she had thought it might be that. She had seen her father and two sisters die of it — And unless she could go away and spend a year in a Swiss open-air cure, the doctor did n't think she'd live through the winter.

Seated on Florrie's frilled sofa, while Florrie, all encompassing tact and urgency, passed on the verdict, it was not of it that she first thought. Her mind, perhaps in an instinctive recoil, fixed itself upon the oddly insistent impression of pinkness that she was aware, suddenly, of receiving. Florrie's blouse, under her cheek, was a bright blur of pink; and when she turned her eyes away from that they met, everywhere, garlands of roses looped with knots of blue ribbon on a background of white and pink stripes. Too much pink: this was the absurdly irrelevant criticism that, dimly, but as if culminatingly, emerged. She must have felt it as too pink for many years, but only now was she aware of it. And then, with a sense of refuge, came the vision of her pansies: those borders of white and purple pansies under the dull brick wall that she had looked at so fondly that morning before starting for her journey. But she would have to leave her pansies, then; not only for a season; perhaps forever.

It was in this form and in this roundabout way that the thought of death became real to her; with pathos rather than poignancy and with yearning

regret rather than fear. She did not feel afraid of dying. Her quiet little faith that, though so still, was deep enough for all her needs, had sunken wells of wordless security in her. She was not afraid; but the thought of leaving her flowers, her garden, the skyey view from her bedroom window, symbolized for her all the sadness of death. There was, indeed, nothing else to regret much. Every one she had loved most dearly was gone; and when all was said and done, and in spite of the peace of the last five years, she was a battered, tired little creature, with few of the springs of desire left in her. Her life, as she looked back on it, seemed to have been spent, for the most part, in crowded buses on wet evenings, with not enough lunch behind and not enough dinner before her; in those, and in going up and down steps of strangers' houses. There had been, of course, more than that; she had never, except when her dearest young sister died, been very unhappy, and there had been interests and alleviations always — beautiful evening walks across the Park and relaxations over tea with a book before the fire in her lodging-house sitting-room; but the past, when she called it up in an image, seemed always to crumple into that jolting, rattling, wet, and crowded omnibus. So there was not much strength now left in her for resistance or regret; but she would do her best to live, and that really meant that she would do her best not yet to leave her garden.

When she was older, too old to dig a little, divide the pansies in autumn and sow the penny packets in spring, too old to care for the Madame Alfred Carrière or the Pyrus japonica, would be time enough to go. But in coming back to it that eve-

ning, she knew how deeply, how tenaciously she loved her garden. It was the only thing she had ever owned in her life, the only thing she had ever made: her work and creation; its roots seemed to go down into her heart; and she could not feel that in heaven there would be old white roses and white and purple pansies and mignonette and sweet peas that one had sown one's self from penny packets.

II

At first, when Florrie told her, the verdict had seemed unescapable. She had said, after the little silence in which she received it, — the silence in which much had happened to her, — she had said, in a very quiet voice that had surprised herself, "I'm afraid it's no good, then, Florrie dear. I can't afford to go away."

Aunt Kate had left her only the house and its contents. She had saved only the tiniest sum herself — just enough to yield an income that paid for her food and light and coal. To pay for Jane, her good old servant, to pay for her clothes and washing, to pay for the trips to London and the crumpets and cakes that she gave her friends at tea in Acacia Road, she had still to depend upon the pupils that, fortunately, she had found in the small Surrey town. On three afternoons a week she sallied forth, peacefully indeed, with no sense of anxiety or pressure, and made her way to the houses of the doctor, the rector, the big London manufacturer, and instructed their young daughters in the excellent Munich method that she had imbibed in youth. With these delightfully convenient strings to her bow she could manage per-

fectly. But to give them up and to pay for an open-air cure in Switzerland was outside the bounds of her possibilities.

So she explained, in the quiet voice, to Florrie; and it was then that Florrie, revealing herself as a more wonderfully kind friend than even in Miss Glover's grateful eyes she had always been, said, the tears suddenly hopping down her cheeks and making dark spots on the pink silk blouse,—

"Stuff and nonsense, my dearest Edie! What do a few pounds more or less matter at a time like this? You *shall* go! It's a question of life or death. Now, not a word, my dear, and listen to me. *I'll* send you. It'll be the proudest day of my life that sees you off. What's all my good luck worth to me if I can't give a friend a helping hand when she needs it? I can sell out some investments. I've more than enough, and I'll soon fill my stocking again. And you shall go as soon as we can get you ready; and first class, my dear, all the way, boat *and* train. Don't I know the difference it makes — and getting off to sleep on the way? Jane shall go with you to take care of you — oh, yes, she shall! — I won't hear of your going alone; and you'll come back next spring a sound woman.

"I know all about those Swiss open-air cures," Florrie rushed on. "They're magical. Poor Lady Forestalls was at death's door three years ago — there she is — over there on the piano — that tall, regal-looking woman with the Pekinese: worse than you she was, by far. And she went to Switzerland and came back in six months' time, cured; absolutely cured. Never a touch of it since. She does everything and goes everywhere. And such scenery, my dear, such flowers! You'll revel in it. And

Julia Forestalls told me that the people were so interesting. She made a number of friends — Italian, German, Russian. You shall take my tea-basket, my dear. Jane can carry it easily. It's a gem; everything complete and so convenient. It makes simply all the difference on a journey if you can get a steaming hot cup of tea at any time you like, day *or* night. I saved Cora Clement's life with my tea-basket in Venice; she says so herself. She got chilled to the bone on the lagoons. Over there on the writing-bureau she is; American. Not a beauty, but *jolie laide*, and dresses exquisitely — as you can see. She's always taken for a Frenchwoman."

Miss Glover, even more than usual, felt to-day that dear Florrie dazed and bewildered her a little; but the mere fact that Florrie's tears had dried so soon, that she could, so soon, be telling her about Lady Forestalls and Cora Clement, was encouraging. Miss Glover felt that her case was evidently but one among many to which Florrie had seen the happiest endings — a comparatively unalarming affair; entirely unalarming, though exceedingly engrossing, Florrie's tone and demeanour indicated, when taken in hand by such as she.

And how she took it in hand! There was no use protesting against anything. As always, Florrie made her feel that she knew better than she herself could what was good for her. It was all arranged before they parted that day, and Florrie had further smoothed her path by declaring that nothing would suit her better, if Edie really felt fussed about the money, than to take The Nook during her absence. "The very thing I need," said Florrie. "I've been thinking for some time

that I must have a little place near London to run down to for week-ends. And you've that duck of a spare-room, too, I remember, where I can put up a friend; and it's so near town that people can motor down and have tea with me of an afternoon. My dear, nothing could be more providential."

During the three weeks that followed, Florrie, in London, shopped for her, decided on the clothes she would need and the conveniences that she must take; and interesting parcels arrived at The Nook every morning. It was strange and exciting to be made much of, strange and exciting to be on a journey; she had not been out of England since that stay, in girlhood, in Munich; and in spite of the shadow hanging over her, the sense of haste lest she be overtaken, she felt the days of preparation as almost happy ones. Jane, it was true, was rather gloomy about everything, but even beneath her sombre demeanour Miss Glover felt sure that she, too, was touched by the sense of adventure, for Jane had never been out of England at all.

And now the boxes were all packed and Miss Glover's dressing-case stood open, half filled, in her bedroom, waiting only for her sponge bag and pin-tray and brush and comb to be added next morning, when she and Jane and Florrie were to go up together to Victoria, and Florrie was to see them off; and while Jane prepared her most festive tea, Miss Glover had been showing Florrie all over her new domain on that August afternoon when she had spoken of her garden as horrid. Florrie, in answer to her shy request that she might, perhaps, if it was n't too much bother, sow some mignonette and sweet peas for her next spring, had answered with reassuring decision, "To be sure I will, my dear.

I'll take care of everything and have it all waiting for you spick and span when you get back." And then Jane's gong had summoned them in, and it had been reassuring, too, to see how benignant were the glances that Florrie cast about the little sitting-room while she stirred her tea and commended Jane's cakes. "Beeswax and turpentine for all the furniture once a week. *I* know. And dusted every morning without fail."

Yes, it was safe in Florrie's competent hands, dear little room. In her heart of hearts, though she had no faintest flicker of criticism or comparison except for that one strangely painful memory of the rush of pinkness, — Miss Glover very much preferred her own room, shabby and simple as it was, to Florrie's; just as, though so well aware of the relative insignificance of her garden, she knew that she would prefer it to the Isaacsons', with its arches of roses and its geraniums in white stone vases. She liked quiet, soft, gentle things; the ever-so-faded ancient chintzes on her aunt's chairs and sofa, showing here and there a ghostly bird of paradise or a knot of nearly obliterated flowers, her aunt's absurd, faded, old-fashioned carpet, — fortunately faded! — and her grandmother's Lowestoft cups ranged above the mantelpiece. Everything was in its place; her knitting-basket between her chair and the fireplace; her beaded footstool before the best armchair, where Florrie sat; the little table, with a bowl of white and purple pansies on it, where lay the daily paper and the two books from the circulating library. All were dear to her; all spoke of continuity with the past, of long association, of quiet, small, peaceful activities; and as she looked about she knew that her heart would

have sunk a little at the thought of leaving them, had it not been for Florrie's sustaining presence.

Florrie, while her second cup of tea was being made, drew forth and laid beside the tea-tray, with an air of infinite sagacity, the coupons for the reserved seats in the first-class carriage. "*I'll* keep my eyes on those," said Florrie. It was almost as if they had been tickets for some brilliant entertainment — as if, Miss Glover felt, she and Jane were going to be taken to the opera rather than to Switzerland. It was owing to Florrie that she had almost come to feel that Switzerland *was* the opera.

But that night, when they had gone upstairs and the house was still, the sense of adventure deserted her. Sitting in her dressing-gown before her mirror while, with hands that tired so easily, she brushed and braided her hair, she felt, suddenly, very middle-aged, very lonely, ill, and almost frightened. The look of her gaping dressing-case, as she glanced round at it, was frightening, as was the emptiness of the mantelpiece, from which the family photographs had all been taken to be packed, together with the Bible and prayer-book from the table near her bed. It was a room already deserted. It looked as it might look if she had died. What, indeed, in spite of Florre's good cheer, if she were to die out there, alone, away from everything and every one she knew? And, with a curious impulse, rising to go and close the gaping dressing-case, she realized that she had not said good-bye to anything. The morning had all been spent in packing — in that and in preparations for Florrie's arrival; and all the afternoon Florrie had been with her, and she was to be with her till her departure tomorrow. She would not again be alone in her little

house; she would not again be alone in her garden. The thought of her pansies came with a pang of reproach; it was as if she had forgotten them, like children sent to bed without a good-night kiss.

She drew her curtain and looked out. Yes; there they were. The moon was shining brightly and the white pansies lay below like pools of milk upon the ground. She looked at them for some moments, while the soft fragrance of the night mounted to her and seemed with gently supplicating hands to draw her forth; and then, cautiously — for Florrie slept across the way — but with decision, she put on her heavy cloak over her dressing-gown, wrapped a shawl about her head and shoulders, and stole downstairs.

The drawing-room was very dark; she felt her way swiftly through it past the familiar objects, and the conservatory door opened on a flood of silvery light. She saw the high, shining disk of the moon, and the great black poplar tree that grew in the neighbouring garden seemed vast against the sky. As she stepped out, she made herself think of Diamond in "At the Back of the North Wind." It was like stepping into a fairy-tale; only something more sweet and solemn than a fairy-tale, as that book was; something, for all its beauty, a little awful. But when she looked down from the moon, the sky, the poplar, there was only sweetness. The fragrance that had solicited her seemed now to welcome her, to clasp and caress her. The pansies were all looking up at her. On the wall Madame Alfred Carrière was more beautiful than she had ever before seen her, her pale flowers and buds making a constellation against the darkness.

She walked round the path, looking at it all, so

glad that she had come, smiling — a child in fairy-land, or a spirit arrived in Paradise and finding it strange yet familiar — as Paradise should be. Perhaps, she thought, dying would be like that: a stepping out from the darkness into something vast and solemn that would slowly gather about one into well-known and transfigured shapes, into white pansies growing thickly at one's feet. She stooped in the moonlight and passed her hands over their upturned faces. They were flowers entranced, neither sleeping nor awake; and she felt, as her fingers touched their soft, dewy petals, as if their dreams with their whiteness flowed into her. To leave them was like leaving her very self, yet the parting now was all peace and innocent acquiescence, like them, and she was still smiling as she whispered to them, "Good-bye, darlings."

III

SWITZERLAND was like the opera, and for her first months there Miss Glover felt as if she watched it from a box — very much at the back and looking past many heads at the vast display. Everything that Florrie had said was true: the scenery was more magnificent than she could have imagined, oppressively more, and the people, again oppressively, more interesting. They were, these people, engaged all of them in trying to keep alive, and, when they failed in that, in dying, dying under one's eyes from day to day; and in the publicity of such occupations there was something as abnormal as was the size of the mountains. Some of these people she came to know a little — those, usually, who had given up: the dear little Russian girl who,

alas, died in December; the sulky, affectionate French boy; and the large yet wasted German singer who made Miss Glover think of a splendid fruit keeping still its shell of form and colour while eaten away inside by wasps. Fraülein Schmidt liked to have her play Schubert and Schumann songs to her, and still tried to sing attainable passages here and there in a queer, booming, hollow voice that made Miss Glover, again, think of the wasps imprisoned and buzzing. But most of the people remained parts of the spectacle to her. They engaged, when they were well enough, in winter sports; they talked together of books she had never heard of, and of things she had never thought of; and often, moreover, she could not understand what they said, as her languages did not extend beyond rather simple French and German, and Dante with a dictionary.

The only other English person there was a young man who made her think of the Prince Charlie roses; he was sombre and delicate and beautiful and did not talk to anybody, sitting apart and reading all day long. Miss Glover wondered a good deal about him, and watched him sometimes from her place on the snow-sifted balcony when they lay there encased in fur bags and buttressed with hot-water bottles. His name was Lord Ninian Carstairs; and that was like the roses, too.

Once, when they were alone on the balcony, their recumbent chairs near one another, he lifted his eyes suddenly and found hers fixed upon him, and perhaps their wistful and ingenuous absorption touched him, for, flushing faintly, — he was a shy young man, — he asked if she were feeling better.

She said she could n't quite tell. It was difficult

to tell what one felt, did n't he find? Everything was so different; so exciting in a way; and when one was excited one felt, perhaps, better than one was.

Lord Ninian laughed shortly at that, and said that he did n't feel excited; he wished he could.

"I'm depressed, too, sometimes," said Miss Glover; and then he sighed.

"One gets so abominably homesick in this hole," he said.

She had never thought of such splendour as being, possibly, to anybody, a hole; but she knew what it was to feel homesick. They smiled at each other when they met after that, she and Lord Ninian, and he lent her magazines and books. When she heard that he had died, — she had not seen him for a week and had feared for him, — she felt very, very sad and her thoughts turned in great longing to Acacia Road and to her garden.

She wanted very much to live to see her garden again; but she could not help being frightened lest she should not; for, as the winter wore on, it became evident to her, and all the more because every one else was so carefully unaware of it, that one of the things that Florrie had predicted was not to come true. She was not to return cured. She was not going to get better. At first the slow burning of fever had seemed only part of the excitement, but she could not go on thinking it that when it began to leave her breathless, trembling, faint. By the time that the miracle of the Alpine flower-meadows was revealed to her and she had watched the snow recede and the jonquils and anemones advance, she knew that if she wished to die at home she must soon go. They would not consent to that at once. They said that the spring months were full of

magic, and she was persuaded to stay on. They were magically beautiful and she was glad to see them, but she longed more and more to see her little garden. She dreamed sometimes of her pansies at night, and it seemed to her once that as she stooped in the moonlight and touched them she was cured; the fever fell from her; a cool white peace flowed into her veins; and when she looked up from them, the night was gone and the sun was rising over her Surrey hills.

At the beginning of June they consented that she should go. They did not tell her the truth, of course. They said that she might pass the summer in England, since she wished so much to return there, and that she must come back for next winter; but she knew that if her state had not been recognized as hopeless they would not have let her go. It was hopeless, and she summoned all her strength and resolution, that she might live until she reached Acacia Road.

IV

Florrie met her at Victoria. Florrie did not know that it was hopeless, though she knew that it was not as yet, a cure; but from the way that she controlled her features to a determined joviality Miss Glover could infer her shock, her grief, her consternation. The glance, too, that Jane and Florrie exchanged was revealing, had she been in need of revelations.

After a night in Florrie's flat, however, she knew that she looked so much better that poor Florrie, when she came to see her in the morning, was quite erroneously cheered. "*You're* all right,"

Florrie declared. "The journey's knocked you about a bit; but once we get you down to Surrey, Jane and I, you'll pick up in no time. After all, there's no place like home, is there?"

Miss Glover, from her pillows, smiled. She felt very fond of kind Florrie and sorry for her that she must, so soon, suffer sadness on her account.

It was difficult, in the train, to listen to Florrie's talk. After her fright of the day before, Florrie had cheered up so tremendously that she talked even more than usual, of her friends, her enterprises, of how she was going yachting that autumn with the Forestalls, and of how Di Haymouth had just had a baby.

"A splendid boy, and Mr. and Mrs. Isaacson are fairly off their heads with pride and pleasure. Such a layette, my dear, you never saw! Real lace through and through — and the cradle of a regular little prince! I gave him a silver porringer for his christening; a lovely thing, all heavy *repoussé* work with his initials on a shield at one side. Di say it's the prettiest porringer she ever saw."

It was difficult to listen to Florrie and to nod and smile at the right moment when she was thinking of her garden and wondering if Florrie had really remembered to sow the sweet peas and mignonette. Even if she had n't, the Madame Alfred Carrière and the Prince Charlie roses would be out, and the last tulips, and the pansies, of course. And it was such a beautiful day, just such a day as that she had risen to look at when, in her dream, the pansies had cured her.

The drive from the station up to Acacia Road was a short one. The dear, foolish little porch was there, the bow-window, the laurel-bushes. Her

own home. As she saw it she felt such a lift of the heart that it seemed to her, too, that she might be going to get better after all. Florrie and Jane helped her out and she and Florrie went into the sitting-room. She looked round it, smiling, while she felt her happy, fluttering breaths like those of some wandering bird put back into its own dear cage again, safe, secure, bewildered a little in its contentment. She was like such a trivial little cage-bird; she was meant for Acacia Road, and not for Swiss mountains.

Everything was the same: even her knitting-basket stood waiting for her, and all that caught her eye with their unfamiliarity were the flowers, the profusion of flowers, standing in bowls and vases everywhere; perhaps almost too many flowers, — that was like dear, exuberant Florrie, — and all pink.

"Oh — how lovely they are!" she said, finding the fluttering breath fail her a little. "How dear of you, Florrie, to have it all arranged like this!"

"They look welcoming, don't they?" said Florrie, who laughed with some excitement. "Will you rest, dear, or come into the garden?"

"Oh, the garden, please. I'm not at all tired. I can rest later."

Florrie still led her by the arm. They went into the conservatory and there came to her then the strangest, dizziest sense of pink — everywhere pink! — shining in at her through the sea-green glass, bursting in at her through the open door.

For a moment she thought that her mind was disordered, and looked up with large, startled eyes at Florrie; but, beaming as she had never yet seen her beam, all complacency and triumphant benevo-

lence, Florrie nodded, saying, "Now for your surprise, my dear. Now for your garden. Just see what I've made of it to welcome you!"

They stepped out. Pink. Pink everywhere, above, below, around one. The paths were arched with swinging iron chains on which, already, the long festoons advanced. The border, heaping itself up splendidly against the wall, was splashed with white, yellow, blue and purple, a blaze of colour indeed, but pink dominated, like the sound of trumpets in an orchestra. It also made Miss Glover think, strangely, sickly, of the sound of a gramophone. There was no lawn. The centre of the garden was flagged, with a highly ornamental sun-dial in the middle and a white garden seat and a wonderful white stone basin for the birds. There were no Prince Charlie roses, no mignonette and sweet peas, there were no pansies. Her garden had disappeared.

"There!" said Florrie.

She led her to the garden seat. From here Miss Glover, as she sank down upon it, could see that the back of the house was also dappled with the incessant colour.

"Is n't it a marvel!" said Florrie. "I hardly dared hope they'd grow as they have, but Dorothy Perkins is a winner, and these latest climbers run her close. I spared nothing, my dear, nothing — manure, bone-meal, labour. The men were working here for a week last autumn. All the old soil was carted away and a rich loam put in three feet deep. I put them in big. I knew I could get them to take if I took enough pains over it. Those chains will be covered in another month. I knew it would do you more good than any open-air cure to find such

a garden waiting for you. I'd defy anybody to have the blues in this garden! In its little way it's just an epitome of joy, is n't it? It's done *me* good, to begin with! I've been having tea out here every day in my week-ends and every one who's seen it and heard about my plan says I'm a regular old fairy with a wand. Mrs. Isaacson motored down only last Saturday and thought it was a perfect poem. And so it is, though I say it as should n't."

Florrie had paused on the deepest breath of purest satisfaction, and the time had come when Miss Glover must speak. She must find words to express gratitude and astonishment. She must not burst into tears. She felt that if she began to cry she would at once be very ill. She did not want to be taken ill before dear, good, kind Florrie. And it was, of course, a beautiful garden; far more beautiful than hers had ever been, no doubt; yet it hurt her so — to find her garden gone — that she heard her voice come in gasps as she said, "Dear Florrie — you are a wonderful friend — you are indeed. — I can never thank you enough. It's a miracle."

Florrie patted her shoulder — she had her arm around her shoulders. "My best thanks will be to see you happy in it, Edie dear, and getting well and strong again in it. It's a regular surprise-packet, this garden, let me tell you, my dear. It'll go on, that border, right up till November, one thing after another: I thought it all out, pencil and paper and catalogue in hand. I went over the whole colour-scheme with Mrs. Isaacson — there's no one who knows more about it. And since most of the herbaceous things came from her garden, it did n't cost as much as you'd think. They've always

heaps of plants left over when they divide in autumn, and everything was at my disposal; and all the latest varieties, as I need n't say. Wait till you see the lilies — yes, my dear, I've found room for everything; where there's a will there's a way is my motto, you know — and the phloxes and the chrysanthemums."

She would never see them, though she was sure that they would all be very beautiful; she would never see these latest varieties from Mrs. Isaacson's garden. And she would never see her own little garden again. How wonderfully fortunate it was — the thought went through her mind confusedly as she sat there, feeling herself droop against Florrie's shoulder — that she was not to live with Florrie's and to go on missing her own garden. How fortunate — but her thoughts swam more and more and tears dazed her eyes — that she had not to say good-bye twice to her pansies. She had died, then, really, — that was it, — on the moonlight night when she had last seen them. And she had left the house to Florrie, dear kind Florrie, and Florrie would go on having tea happily under the festoons of roses.

PINK FOXGLOVES

HEY were only beginning to revert. Last summer they had stood, spires of fretted snow tapering at the points to jade-coloured buds, at the edge of the little copse where the garden path lost itself among young larches, birches, hazels, and poplars, black and white. The sun set behind the copse, spreading in the summer evenings a pale gold background, and often when he went to look at his foxgloves and to listen to the lonely song of the willow-wren, rippling, like a tiny rill of water, from the heart of the wood, Aubrey Westmacott had felt that there was something almost dangerous in such bliss as this. To breathe this limpid air, to hear the willow-wren, to look at white foxgloves, and to know himself free forever from the long oppression of London — if he could have sung his wistful gratitude, his melancholy joy, the song might have been like the bird's.

This year the change in the foxgloves had come as a complete surprise; he was still a novice at gardening. He had left his beloved garden for a week; regretfully, for he could not bear to lose a day of it — he was like a lover with a bride, long pined for, who each day grows dearer and lovelier;

but he had gone, because it seemed churlish to refuse the old don friend at Cambridge — and when he returned, at evening, and had walked down to the copse and had seen them standing there, so delicately yet so decisively altered, the shock of the surprise had seemed all delight. He had intended white foxgloves to rise, always, against the copse; but then he had not known how lovely pink foxgloves could be. He had never seen them of such a shade, each bell of palest rose brimmed with shadows of mauve, and finely freaked within. Regiments of the white flowers had remained steadfast, so that there could be no sense of loss, and he had picked an armful of the pink ones and carried them back to the house, feeling, as he looked at them against his shoulder, that he would have liked to kiss them. He spent the remaining hours of dusk in arranging them. He never allowed the parlourmaid to arrange the flowers. That she saw him, tolerantly, if with a flavour of irony, as a very eccentric gentleman, he was aware, just as he was aware, quite cheerfully, that many of his kind neighbours found him a rather absurd one. But one of the deepest joys this new life afforded him, after the paternal bliss of seeing the darlings grow, was in disposing them about the rooms, with a loving discrimination that Ridley's skilled but cold and conventional hands could never have accomplished.

This evening he put the foxgloves in the drawing-room, a tall jar on the bureau, a taller jar on the piano, and a group in the vast white Chinese bowl, wedged cunningly into place with stones among the stems. Here he could look at them next morning as he worked at his history. He always worked

in the drawing-room, for there he had the morning sun, and, if he could not see his massed and tiered herbaceous border, could look out at the cherry tree and at the tiny squares of terraced lawns, dropping from level to level, with their stone steps and low stone walls and narrow jewelled bordering of flowers.

There was a very nice little study behind the dining-room — it was from the dining-room that one saw the herbaceous border, and he could meditate future rearrangements and harmonies while he ate his breakfast — but the study looked out on the stable shrubberies. He liked, too, to feel himself encompassed by his treasures, old and new, while he wrote of mediæval customs; his mother's incompetent but loveable water-colours, sketches of her old home, the grey, ancient, gabled house among just such Cotswold slopes and uplands as his western windows looked out upon, though his mother's old home, passed long since to alien hands, lay on the other side of the county; and his father's seafaring trophies, from China and Japan and far Pacific islands, and all the lately acquired delightful solidities of Jacobean oak, and his maturest choice in printed linen. Here, on their background of mullioned window or dark wainscoting — such a gem of a little Jacobean house it was — the pink foxgloves greeted him next morning, set among feathery heads and sharp green spears of meadow grass, glimmering and poised on tiptoe, like groups of softly blushing nymphs, and he stood for a long time looking at them, his hands clasped behind his back.

He was forty-six, a fragile little man, blanched and stooping from the long years of imprisonment in

the Government office, from which the undreamed-of inheritance had released him only three years ago, with faded gold hair hanging across his forehead and a gentle face of stifled dreams, the mouth slightly puckering as if in intentness on some task. The eyes, of a dim yet dense pastel blue that told darkly in his faded face, were intent, too, but not acute; they dwelt; they did not penetrate. He wore a small, short moustache, and a pair of gold *pince-nez* dangled at his coat button.

Delicate as he had always been, and ineffectual, as he had always so dejectedly been aware of being, he, too, with all his relatives, had thought it very fortunate when, on leaving the university, he had secured the tiny post in the Civil Service. There, he knew, he would stay; he was not of the type that rises, and he had never during the long years that followed rebelled consciously against his fate. He was, he often told himself reproachfully, so very fortunate compared with men far abler and more deserving than himself. He found that he could not write, as he had hoped to do, after the conscientious hours at the office. He read a great deal, and crept away to the country for every week-end, sitting by meadow or river, like a dusty mouse let loose from its trap and softly panting in the sunlight. He was often ill, and the doctors always recommended a country life, but it was not on hygienic grounds that he pined for limpid spaces and starry solitudes. There was a soft passion in his blood, inherited from the mother whom he so much resembled, for the sights and sounds and occupations of rurality. He adored flowers. He often dreamed of them at night, and in waking hours the thought of a garden of his own haunted him. Some-

times he went to stay with friends in their gardens; but this was an ambiguous joy; it was like seeing the pink and white babies playing about their nurses and perambulators in the Flower Walk in Kensington Gardens, and having no claim to kiss any of them. He loved children, too.

And now he found himself transplanted to this wonderful fairy tale by Uncle Percy's legacy. He still, often, could hardly realize it. There was a haze of dizzy delight over all the memory of the last three years; the search for a house, the securing of Meadows, the furnishing and ordering of his household — he who had lived in rooms in Kensington for twenty-four years, ruled over by a flawlessly honest but relentless landlady! To think that he could have other fish for breakfast than finnan haddock, and other vegetables in winter than cabbage! This was a minor but an emphatic pleasure.

But above all, around all, the garden! He had planned and planted it all, studying books, brooding over catalogues, making lists, writing labels ever so neatly. The vegetables were given over to the gardener; but his flowers, except for deep trenching — and oh, how deep, how rich, he saw to it that it was! he tended single-handed. His seed-boxes, his cold-frames, his tools and baskets, how he adored them all, and how happy he was in any small personal economies, so that extravagance in manure and bone-meal and leaf-mould should be well justified. The history of mediæval customs was also a long-cherished ideal, but it remained of secondary interest; his heart, always, was in the garden, meditating mulchings, waterings, or hoeings. Every dream had come true, had more than

realized itself. Was it any wonder that he should feel himself going softly in his amazed gratitude, should sometimes, as when he listened to the willow-wren at evening, feel that such happiness was dangerous.

It had not seemed to flaw the happiness, it had seemed but to add a sweeter undertone to it, melancholy yet blissful, that into the new Paradise there should have stolen a new longing, and that, as of old, he should find himself haunted by an unattainable loveliness. He thought of this as he looked at the pink foxgloves, for they made him think of the face of Leila Pickering. "Yes, yes, yes," he said to himself, as he turned to the mediæval history, for he had the habit, caught from his long loneliness, of speaking much to himself and with a quaint repetition of words that stole into his social speech, "it is she they are like; she they are like. Lovely, lovely, like her."

Later in the morning, privileged as she was to interrupt even the history, it was Mrs. Pomfrey who informed him that the strange, delicate beauty was transitory, an unfixed type, and that, next year, or in a very few years, the palely rosy nymphs would be purple.

"They'll revert. You can get pink ones, you know, from the seedsmen; rosy carmine they call it; but not at all this colour. I've never seen a colour quite like this. Your soil must do it. I've always thought the soil of Meadows had magic in it."

Mrs. Pomfrey was the late rector's widow, and lived in a thicket of roses half a mile away in the village. She was tall, black-robed, majestic, and melancholy, with a deep voice and black eyes and a

high, hooked nose and large false teeth that shifted slightly and slightly clashed together when she spoke. She had survived all emotions except the grief of having to grow her roses on a clayless soil, and to this grief she often returned. A girlhood friend of Aubrey Westmacott's mother, she had been his link with Windbury. His week-ends with her there had been the very comets of his dark London sky, and for years he had seen Meadows inadequately tenanted, with an eye of brooding love.

"Oh! they'll revert to purple, then," he said, somewhat distressed; and he repeated "purple, purple," several times, as if to familiarize himself with the sound and very sight of it, while Mrs. Pomfrey answered him, "Give 'em time and they'll all revert. You must dig 'em up and sow again from year to year if you want to keep 'em pure."

"Not that I don't care very much for the purple ones," said Aubrey; "they are most beautiful flowers, most beautiful; but it's wild in woods, that I like best to see them. It will be a business to replant; dear me! It took me a day of hard work to establish my white ones in that haphazard-looking little colony down there."

"Gardening is all hard work," said Mrs. Pomfrey, "and all disappointment, for the most part, too. It's only the things you did n't expect to succeed that ever do, and any effect you particularly count on is pretty sure to fail you." She tempered her grimness by a slight, bleak smile, however, for she and Aubrey Westmacott understood each other and had the gardener's soul, for which no work is too hard and no disappointments too many.

"It will be very wonderful to have the intervals of pink to look forward to, though," Aubrey found the atonement. "They are singularly lovely, are n't they? Will you think me very silly, now, I wonder, or sillier than you always think me?"

"I don't think you silly, my dear Aubrey," Mrs. Pomfrey interposed, "only guileless; you are very guileless; I've thought that ever since you were taken in by that dreadful cook of yours, who had red hair, and got drunk and rubbed the whitebait through a sieve."

"Well," Aubrey continued, smiling his gentle, tentative smile, "my foxgloves, at all events, can't take me in, and since they are so very unusual and so lovely I thought I'd ask a few people in to-day to see them. The Carews, you know, and Barton, and Mrs. and Miss Pickering. And you — if you can come. I'll put it off till to-morrow, if that will secure you, only the foxgloves may not be quite so lovely by then."

"I will come with pleasure, my dear Aubrey," said Mrs. Pomfrey, "and though nobody will appreciate your foxgloves as you do, we shall all enjoy your tea."

"Miss Pickering cares very much for flowers, you know, very much. We've talked a great deal about flowers," said Aubrey, swinging his eyeglass and nodding as he looked at his old friend.

"Does she? She does n't know much about 'em though."

"No; all those years in India, and in towns. She has lived so much in towns. Such an inappropriate life it seems for such an exquisite creature."

"Does it?" said Mrs. Pomfrey. She added after

a moment, as if with concession, "She is a very pretty girl."

Aubrey Westmacott was not acute. "Is n't she?" he said eagerly. "A beautiful and noble and lovely head, is n't it? like a flower; she is altogether like a flower, with her slenderness and height. Do you know," he went on, swinging his glasses more quickly, while he kept his ingenuous eyes on his friend, "can you guess the flower she makes me think of? In that pale pink dress, that pink dress she wore the other day at the rectory garden party, and with that white hat lined with pink. Can you guess?" His eyes overflowed with their suggestion.

Mrs. Pomfrey moved hers from his face to the foxgloves. "Like those, I suppose you mean."

"*Is n't* she?" he repeated. "Now, is n't it quite remarkable? You see it, too."

"Yes; I see it," said Mrs. Pomfrey. She studied the flowers and again, after a deliberating pause, went on, "Do you think Mrs. Pickering is like purple foxgloves?"

Aubrey's eyeglass tumbled from his hand. He was astonished, almost indignant. "Mrs. Pickering?"

"She looks like her daughter," said Mrs. Pomfrey; "as much like her, that is, as a purple foxglove looks like a pink one."

"I can imagine nothing more unlike a flower than Mrs. Pickering," said Aubrey, with gathered repudiation.

"No; certainly; she's not at all like a flower. She's more like a sparrow — something sharp and commonplace and civic. I only intended an analogy, for she must have been a very pretty girl."

"Nothing could be less sharp or commonplace or

civic than Miss Pickering." Aubrey was now deeply flushed.

"Oh, of course not, my dear Aubrey; she is very unusual looking," Mrs. Pomfrey again conceded. "And she is tall and her mother is short. Old Colonel Pickering, too, was tall, I remember. I saw him once or twice when they were living at Cheltenham the year before he died! a bleached, dull, oppressed old man, a much better type than the wife; she ruled him, I heard, with a rod of iron. One may be sure that she does n't rule Miss Leila. She is a young lady with a will of her own, unless I am much mistaken in her."

"A will of her own; yes, yes" — Aubrey eagerly, pathetically to Mrs. Pomfrey's ear, gathered up the ambiguous fragments — "and great firmness of will; great decision of character; and the serenity, you know, the sweet dignity that go with it, that so often go with it. You have noticed her serenity, her dignity. And she is very silent — a great contrast to her mother. I often wonder what brought them here. It's very fortunate for all of us; but Mrs. Pickering is, as you say, so civic, yes, so commonplace, that I don't understand what she can find in this quiet place to please her. She certainly does n't care about her garden. Those beds about The Cottage are very distressing; they distress Miss Pickering."

"It's quite clear to me why they came," said Mrs. Pomfrey. "They can't afford London, and, I suppose, know nobody there if they could; and there is more chance of a pretty girl like Miss Leila marrying well here than there is in Cheltenham. She does n't hunt, it's true; but the hunting makes a difference, and there is a good deal going on in

one way and another. Mrs. Pickering hoped to capture Arthur Barton; she made that very evident. But he has never looked at another woman since his wife died, and never will, I imagine; at all events, he did n't look at Miss Leila."

Aubrey's eyes, dwelling on her, expressed reprobation and almost horror. "She tried to marry her daughter to Barton! That lovely child and Barton! What a terrible woman!"

"Miss Pickering must be a good twenty-five, my dear Aubrey, and I was married at eighteen. No; I don't like Mrs. Pickering, but I can see nothing reprehensible in her determination to settle her daughter well in life."

"But Barton! He is fifty! He must be fifty! He must be older than I am; yes, very considerably older than I am."

"Well?" said Mrs. Pomfrey, and there was a mingled reluctance and grimness in her smile, "and do you think of yourself as unmarriageable?"

He ran his hand several times over his head and through his hair. He was still flushed, but suddenly he became pale, swallowing quickly several times.

"Do you know — you have said something — you have made me think something — put something before me. Yes; I must tell you, I must tell you," he said, thrusting his hands into his pockets and fixing his eyes on the wall above Mrs. Pomfrey's head. "I love her; I love Miss Pickering. You may think it absurd. I know I'm a dull old bachelor; everything of that sort; but there it is. Ever since I saw her, a year ago, when they first came. I never dreamed of anything else. A dull old bachelor, nothing to offer, and twice her age. But

I can't help wondering — it's only a wonder — whether there might just be a chance for me — if you don't think my age, and all that, makes it impossible. What I mean," Aubrey finished, with a sort of quiet desperation, "is — could she love me? It would have to be love with a girl like Miss Pickering. Am I a man that a girl like that could love?"

Tears now were in his eyes as he brought them back to Mrs. Pomfrey's, and seated upon the sofa, the pink foxgloves in the Chinese bowl beside her, she looked back at him very gravely. She was so grave that for some moments she was silent. Then, before speaking, she took out her spectacles and polished them and put them on. She saw him quite well without them. It was as if in emphasis of the gravity of the moment. And, in the first place, she did not answer his question.

"How much have you seen, my dear Aubrey, of this young lady?" she enquired.

He said, faltering, that he had seen a good deal of Miss Pickering during this spring and summer. Mrs. Pickering had been very kind, had asked him there quite often for tennis; and Miss Pickering had been far more kind, for she had played with him and he was a wretched player, though he was so fond of the game. "And we've had one or two little walks. She came with me to the woods this spring and helped me to dig anemone roots. Oh! I don't pretend it's anything at all; it's only, I know, her kindness; I never thought it anything else. But — if you really don't think me absurd for dreaming of it —?" He faltered to a long gazing question.

Mrs. Pomfrey now rose. She stood looking away

from him, then moved towards the door. "My dear Aubrey," she said, "I think of you what anybody who knows you must think — that the woman who wins your love is one of the most fortunate of women. Whether you are the kind of man that a girl like Miss Pickering could love, I cannot say. I've really seen very little of her. All that I know of her is that she is very pretty and has nice quiet manners. If she marries you, she is, as I say, the most fortunate of women."

Mrs. Pomfrey stepped out into the little square, flagged hall. He accompanied her to the garden gate, following her speechless, while, lifting up her skirts, displaying large, flat-heeled shoes, she stepped down from terrace to terrace. She paused at the last.

"Your Alpine phlox is doing very nicely. You'll find that by next year it will have spread to a foot across," she said. He had put in the Alpine phlox the autumn before under her supervision. She added at the gate, "By that time there may be a Mrs. Westmacott at Meadows."

Pale, almost tearful, he pressed her hand over the gate. "I can't say how I thank you," he murmured.

After a little while he was able to compose his thoughts and write his notes. Thompson took them round, and before lunch he had his answers. They could all come, except Mr. Barton, the dapper, fussy, kindly, pepper-and-salt little squire, who lived in the beautiful big house just over the nearest hill; he had gone up to London for the day.

Aubrey very much enjoyed giving little tea-parties at Meadows. In London he had not enjoyed them at all. He had given them when duty required

it, and he had sometimes been very extravagant and had taken a couple of young girl cousins, up for the season, to a restaurant and a play. But he had never enjoyed these occasions. He was shy and a poor talker, and in London the demands upon one's personality were too heavy to make his entertaining a success. The demands upon one's personality in the country were so small and so easily satisfied; a garden talked for one and entertained for one. All his neighbours, except Mrs. Pickering, whose formal beds did not count, had gardens and were profoundly interested in them. The mild, middle-aged Carews were authorities, and to-day he remembered, with all the pressure of his new preoccupations, that he must question them about that matter of mulching.

At four-thirty he saw two parasols approaching along his box hedges — one was black and one was rose-colour; his heart stood still when he saw it. She would be wearing, then, the dress that made her look more than ever like a pink foxglove. He went down the terraces to greet mother and daughter at the gate.

Mrs. Pickering was short and stout and blonde, her slightly rapacious features — small aquiline nose, small smiling mouth, and small projecting chin — embedded and muffled, as it were, in powdery expanses of cheek and throat. She had an unsmiling, steel-blue eye, appraising, determined, deliberate, under its level bar of dark eyebrow. She did not please Aubrey. Her voice in especial, metallic yet glossy, as if with a careful veneer, disturbed him. A gossiping lady of the neighbourhood had informed him that Mrs. Pickering's origins were quite lacking in distinction and that in her

handsome girlhood she had stalked the stupid Colonel — of a quite good family — and had brought him down, resistless, at the first shot. These stories, for which he had not liked his informant the more, seemed to hover in Mrs. Pickering's glance and smile, and her voice to preserve the flavour of many strategies and triumphs. But Aubrey did not look for long at Mrs. Pickering. She rustled in, dressed in her fashionable black and white, a long chain of steel and brilliants crossing her buttressed bosom, a crest of plumes, black and white, waving upon her head.

Miss Pickering followed her mother. Tall, very tall, and poised with a lovely grace, she was, but for the arresting darkness of brows and lashes, fair; with the infantile fairness, the wild-rose tints, that to the ingenuous male will always seem to vouch for a spiritual exquisiteness to match. And she, too, had small, aquiline features, and her hair was as golden as the heart of a wild rose. She did not smile, like her mother; she was a serene young lady, and silent, as loveliness should be.

"This sweet place!" said Mrs. Pickering. "How charmingly you are improving it, Mr. Westmacott; it looks prettier every time I see it."

"It will take years before it looks as I mean it to look," said Aubrey, leading them up the terraces. "That's the joy of gardening, is n't it? It gives one something to plan for one's whole future." He smiled with a slight appealingness at Miss Pickering. "I am afraid I make myself rather foolish sometimes; I talk so much about my garden."

"I don't wonder that you do," said Mrs. Pickering; "it's quite a little Paradise."

In the drawing-room it was Mrs. Pickering who continued to talk. She renewed her laments over the water-colours. "To think that these beautiful old places should get into the hands of common, middle-class people!" — Aubrey had again to assure her that the people who had bought his mother's old home were very nice indeed. — And Mrs. Pickering said that she doted upon his room, "So old-world, so peaceful!" and expatiated on the view of the terraced lawns and further meadows from the window. She made no comment on his foxgloves, and it seemed like a presage of happiness when Miss Pickering, from her chair, remarked, looking up at them, "How lovely your pink foxgloves are!"

"You think so? You like them? Yes, yes, are they not lovely?" He was delighted with her commendation.

"It's such a pretty idea, putting them with the grasses," said Miss Pickering. "I do like lots of flowers in a room."

He did not have an opportunity of speaking with her alone till after tea. Then, when they had all gone into the garden — how it happened he did not know, for he would not have dared arrange it — he found himself walking down the path towards the copse with Miss Pickering, while behind them, quite far already behind them, Mrs. Pickering paused and exclaimed over the herbaceous border, Mr. Carew beside her. Mrs. Carew and Mrs. Pomfrey had sat down under the trees near the house.

"Would you like to see the pink foxgloves growing?" he asked her. "They are very beautiful growing — more beautiful, I think you'll feel, than in the house."

"I'd love to see them," said Miss Pickering.

They crossed the slip of meadow among the tall grasses and, "There," said Aubrey, pointing, with a faint smile, "there they are!"

"*How* sweet!" said Miss Pickering, with her serene emphasis. They stood to look.

"Do you know," said Aubrey, wondering at himself, but he felt upborne, "that I find they look like you — the pink ones."

"Really?" She smiled now, turning her calm, blue eyes upon him. "That's very flattering."

"No, no; not flattering; not at all flattering," said Aubrey. "Not at all, not at all," he repeated under his breath. He could say no more just then. They walked on, his heart in a flutter.

"Have you ever heard a willow-wren, Miss Pickering?" he asked suddenly.

"A willow-wren? I don't think so. I don't know much about birds."

"It is usually singing in the wood at this hour. Would you care to come and see if we can hear it?"

"I'd love to. I wish you'd teach me all about birds," said Miss Pickering.

His heart was thumping now. They entered the copse. It seemed to him, as they passed them, that the foxgloves were tall angels set about Paradise and welcoming him there. It was very still among the trees. Miss Pickering walked lightly beside him. She, too, looked like an angel. They reached a clearing, where an old fallen log lay, and here they sat down. "We shall hear it, I think," said Aubrey, "if we sit here quietly."

Presently, in the stillness, the little bird began to sing its song, the descending chromatic chain of liquid notes, melancholy and happy; the song of his

very soul, Aubrey felt, and that the bird said for him all that he could not say as, with head bent, he sat listening, the beloved presence beside him. She was part of the song; and in it, as they listened together, their very hearts were mingling. They knew each other, he felt sure, very well.

"How sweet!" she murmured, and he nodded, not able to look at her.

There was a silence, and then the bird sang again. He raises his eyes to hers now, and they turned to him and smiled. Her hand lay on the rough bark of the log, and his was near it. Was it her hand that responded to the unconscious appeal of his, or had he dared? He held it. That was the bewildering, the transcending fact.

"Oh, Miss Pickering! Miss Leila — Leila," he stammered. "May I tell you? May I ask you? Can you care for me?"

Her eyes still smiled, if very gravely. "Do you really love me?" she murmured.

"Oh, Leila!" he repeated. The willow-wren still sang, but all the little chains of sound seemed to be woven into a mist about him, trembling, shining. He held her hand to his lips. He wished to kneel before her. This was Paradise.

"It's so very sudden," said Leila Pickering. "I never dreamed you cared till just now."

"Ever since I saw you first — ever since I saw your eyes. It has been like the fragrance of my flowers at evening, like the moon rising on my flowers. I did not dare to hope — you so young, so lovely; — life before you."

"I think we can be very happy together," said Leila Pickering. "I knew you were a dear from the first moment I saw you, too."

The willow-wren stopped singing now and flew away. In the distance, then, he heard the liquid, dropping notes, and they sounded very sad. His arm was around Leila Pickering, and she leaned her head on his shoulder, so that in an ecstasy of wonder he felt the warm brightness of her hair against his cheek. He had never heard her talk so much. She told him that she had had such a dull, horrid life, so poor, knowing such tiresome, second-rate people. And she did not get on at all well with her mother.

"Nobody has ever really understood me — till you came," she said, sitting upright now beside him, the lovely colour in her cheeks delicately heightened, her eyes shining while she talked. She confided in him. She loved him. They were betrothed — this was the blissful, culminating thought that seemed to go in waves of music through him as he gazed at her. He had ceased to hear the willow-wren's melancholy little song. And then he heard her say:

"I don't want to live in the country, you know. You won't mind? Of course I love it; but we can pay week-end visits, always; — you must know such heaps of nice people; friends. And we'll travel too — I long to see the world. India does n't count. Only think, I've never been to Paris except once — on a horrid, cheap trip, for a week. We never could afford to do anything really amusing or buy any really nice things. My life has been so frightfully dull, and I do want to stretch my wings and see lots of people and entertain and go to plays, you know. I adore London. I'm sure I shall be a good hostess."

It was as if a sword had transfixed him. He seemed to hear a great bell booming — a great

London bell — Big Ben; he had always heard Big Ben from his office in Whitehall, and there had been a jangle of bells in Kensington, too, and a roar, a ceaseless roar. And he seemed to hear the words "Dangerous, dangerous." He had been too happy.

He kept his mild, kind eyes of a pastel blue upon her, and he told himself, while he wrestled, transfixed, that she must not guess; but, as if pressed from his anguish, he heard himself murmuring helplessly, though the gentle, fixed smile held his lips, "You don't care for my little place, then? You would n't care to go on living at Meadows? It's a nice little place, Meadows — a nice little place; we could make it very pretty, and we could have people here, as many as you wanted."

Had a note of pleading, almost desperate, crept in unawares? He saw her calm eyes harden slightly, fixed on him. And he saw, then, tears rise in them.

"Oh! it's so dull, so dull, down here!" she breathed. "It's a darling little place, Meadows — of course, of course I love it. I wish we could afford to keep it, just to run down to for a quiet week-end now and then; but you could n't, could you? And it's far too small for entertaining, is n't it? And no one really smart cares to come and stay with one if one has no shooting, nothing to offer. One can really *live* in London — I've always felt that. You do care more for me than you do for Meadows?" she finished with a smile, half appealing and half challenging.

And looking into the blue eyes, blurred and enlarged, like a child's, with their tears, he saw himself as mean and petty and selfish. He loved her, and was it only as another flower to place among his flowers, another treasure to place among his treas-

ures, a possession of his own, without end or purpose for itself? He loved her, and, unimaginably, she loved him and would marry him. Love must know pain and sacrifice — "pain and sacrifice" — he seemed to hear himself repeating. This was a young life, with its rights to life, and it must stretch its wings.

He smiled at her and raised her hand again to his lips, saying, "Of course I care more for you than for Meadows, dear Leila. Of course we will live where you choose."

And very radiant now, rising and smiling down upon him, Leila Pickering said, "You *are* a dear. I'm sure it's best for us both; we'd get so pokey here. I know we could n't afford Mayfair — I would n't dream of that; but I think a house in one of those little new streets near Cadogan Square would be just right for us; don't you?"

CARNATIONS

I

RUPERT WILSON came into the studio where his wife, who had been out sketching all the morning, was washing her paint-brushes, carefully turning and rubbing them in a pot of turpentine. She wore her painting apron, for Marian in the midst of her artistic avocations was always neat and spotless; and, half turned from him as she was, she did not look round as he entered. Rupert carried his stick, a rustic, ashen stick of which he was very fond, and his Panama hat; he was going out and Marian probably knew that he was going out, and where; this made it more difficult to say in a sufficiently disengaged voice, "I'm just going down to see Mrs. Dallas for a little while."

"Oh! are you?" said Marian. She continued to stir her brushes, and though her wish, also, very evidently was to appear disengaged and indifferent, she was not able to carry it out, for she added, as if irrepressibly, "You need hardly have taken the trouble to come and tell me that."

Rupert looked at her, and since she did not look at him, it was very intently, as if to measure to the full the difference between this Marian and the

Marian he had known and believed in. It was hard to realize that his wife should show a trivial and unworthy jealousy and should strike him such a blow; for that it was a blow he knew from the heat in his cheek and the quickening of his pulse; but, as he looked at her, standing there turned from him, her blue apron girt about her, her black hair bound so gracefully around her head, the realization uppermost in his mind was that Marian, since the second baby had come, had grown very stout and matronly. He seemed to see it to-day for the first time, as if his awareness of it came to emphasize his sudden consciousness of her spiritual deficiency.

When he had met and fallen so very deeply in love with Marian, she had been, if not slender, yet of a supple and shapely form, with just roundness and softness enough to contrast delightfully with her rather boyish head, her air, clear, fresh, frank, of efficiency and swiftness. He had, of course, found her a great deal more than clear and fresh and frank; but, entangled as he had been in that wretched love-affair with Aimée Pollard, — the pretty, untalented young actress who had so shamefully misused him, — torn to pieces and sunken in quagmires as he had been, these qualities in Marian had reached him first like a draught of cold spring water, like dawn over valley hills. These were the metaphors he had very soon used to her when she had applied her firm, kind hands to the disentangling of his knots and her merry, steady mind to tracing out for him the path of honourable retreat. He had found her so wonderful and lovely and had fallen so much in love with her that his ardour, aided by her quiet fidelity, had overborne all the

opposition of her people. Foolish, conventional people they were, — their opposition based, it appeared, almost unimaginably to his generous young mind, on the fact that Marian happened to have money and that he had none, except what he might make by his books; and also, though it was nearly as unimaginable, on the fact that a good many of these people were in the peerage. Marian, a year before he had met her, had broken away from the stereotyped routine of their country life and had come to London to study painting; and it was that Marian of the past who had seemed to share to the full all his idealisms. They had married within three months of their meeting.

From such a dawn, white, fresh, blissful, to this dull daylight! from such a Marian to this narrow-minded matron! Marian still had beauty. Her clear eyes were as blue, her wide, pale lips as sweet; but she was a matron. Her neck had grown shorter, her chin heavier; the girlish grace of glance and smile seemed muted, muffled by their setting; there was no longer any poetry in her physique. And as Rupert stood looking at her and seeing all this, his sense of grievance, though he was unaware of this factor in it, grew deeper.

A little while passed before he said, — and it was, he felt, with dignity, — "I really don't know what you mean by that, Marian."

She had now finished her brushes and had taken up her palette. She began to scrape the edges as she answered, — and her voice was not schooled, it was heavy with its irony and gloom, — "Don't you? I'm sorry."

"I trust indeed that it does n't mean that you are jealous of my friendship for Mrs. Dallas?"

"Friendship? Oh, no; I'm not jealous of any friendship."

"Of my affection, then; of my love, if you like," said Rupert. "You know perfectly well what I feel about all that — and I thought you felt it, too. It's the very centre of my life, of my art; my books turn on it. It's the thing I have most of all to say to the world. Love is n't a measured, limited thing; its nature is to grow and give. My love for Mrs. Dallas does n't touch your and my relation; it enriches it rather."

Marian scraped her palette and said nothing. He could see her cheek, the cheek that ran too massively into her neck. Marian's skin was white and fine; a faint colour now rose to it; a faint colour was, in Marian, a deep blush.

To see her blush like that gave him an odd sensation. It was as if the blush were echoed in his heart; he felt it grow and melt softly, and there drifted through his mind a thought of Mrs. Dallas and of her magic.

Through the studio window, draped with its summer creepers, he could see the two perambulators moored in the shade of the lime tree on the lawn. The babies were having their afternoon sleep. He was very fond of his children; and to feel, now, mingling with the strange, yearning glow, this pause of contemplative fondness, was to feel himself justified anew and anew aggrieved. The glow of tenderness seemed to envelope the babies as well as Mrs. Dallas. And it shut out Marian.

What had she to complain of? Was he not a tender husband and a loving father? Could she suspect his love for Mrs. Dallas — it was she herself who had forced him to use that word — of grossness or

vulgarity? It was as high and as pure as his love for her.

His love for Marian had evolved into the perambulators, and this recognition, flitting unseasonably, vexed him with a sense of slight confusion that made him feel more injured than before. It was true that, theoretically, he held views so advanced as to justify, in true, self-dedicating passion, all manifestations. Practice and theory in his young life had been far apart; but the thought of passion, in connection with Mrs. Dallas, had, as it were, been made visible by Marian's blush; and, slightly swinging his hat, slightly knotting his brows as he looked at the matronly Marian, he groped for some new formulation of his creed, since it was evident that however much he might love Marian it was no longer passion he felt for her. One must perhaps allow that passions could not be contemporaneous; but he had always combated this shackling view.

He stood there, gazing, trying to think it out, — a tall young man, well made yet slightly uncouth, with ruffled, heavy locks and large intent eyes. Something of the look of a not quite purely bred Saint Bernard puppy he had; confiding, young and foolish, with his knotted brow and nose a little overlong. And as he found himself unable to think it out and as Marian still stood silent, scraping, scraping away at the palette in an exasperating fashion, he said, — and now in an openly aggrieved voice, — "I thought you liked her yourself; I thought you quite loved her. You seemed to."

Now that he was losing his temper, Marian was regaining hers. Her voice had all the advantage of quiet intentions as she answered, "I did like her; I

thought her very charming. I don't dislike her now. But I'm sorry to see a woman of her age behaving with so little dignity."

"A woman of her age! Dignity!"

"She is at least forty-five."

"I don't follow your meaning. Is a woman of forty-five cut off from human relationships?"

"From some, certainly; if she has any regard, as I say, for her dignity. And a woman in Mrs. Dallas's position ought to be particularly careful."

"Mrs. Dallas's position!" She really reduced him to disgusted exclamations.

"You know, Rupert, that there are all sorts of stories about her. You know that Mrs. Trotter told us that her first husband divorced her on account of Colonel Dallas. — Other stories, too."

"Upon my word! You astonish me, Marian! You heard all these vile tales when we first came here, — from people, too, who you'll observe, run to Mrs. Dallas's dinner-parties whenever they have the chance, — and you did n't seem to mind them much when you were going there almost every day — and taking every one you knew to see her. What about your Aunt Sophy — if you believed these stories? — An old dragon of conventionality like your Aunt Sophy! You took her again and again, and arranged that luncheon in London with her when you and Mrs. Dallas went up — so that they should have another chance really to make friends. I remember you used the expression, 'really make friends.' It's odd to hear you talking of stories at this late hour."

"I only talk of them because Mrs. Dallas has made me remember them. I am quite as open-minded as you are about such things. I was just

as ready to think well of her — even if they were true. Why do you call them vile? You would n't think it wrong for a woman to leave her husband if she did n't love him, and to go with a man she did love. If Mrs. Dallas did that, why is it vile to say so? — Aunt Sophy, as a matter of fact, said it was a different story. And she was charmed with Mrs. Dallas, just as I'd determined she should be, stories or no stories. I did all I could for her, because I counted myself her friend and thought it a shame that any one so charming should be handicapped in any way. But I did n't imagine that a friend would try to take my husband from me." Marian spoke with severe and deliberate calm.

"I like that! I really do like that!" said Rupert, laughing bitterly. "It's really funny to hear you talk as if Mrs. Dallas could owe you anything! I wish she could hear you! I wish we could have her dispassionate opinion of that hideous old bore of an Aunt Sophy. It was obvious enough that she put up with her simply and solely through friendship for you. Do all you could for her! A woman who has hordes of friends — charming, finished, cosmopolitan people of the world! Why, my dear girl, it's she, let me tell you, who has given you more chances than you ever had in your life for meeting really interesting people! They're not the sort you'd be likely to meet at your Aunt Sophy's, certainly. They'd perish in her *milieu!*"

"Mrs. Dallas does n't perish in it," Marian coldly commented. "On the contrary, I never saw her more alert. She did n't seem to find Aunt Sophy in the least a bore. She was very much pleased indeed to lunch there and she has looked her up every time she's gone to London since; moreover, she's

going to stay with her at Crofts this autumn. It does n't look like boredom."

"I wish her joy of Crofts! She's a complete woman of the world, of course, and she knows how to put up with all sorts and conditions of bores. She's taken on Lady Sophy because she's your friend. It's pitiful — it's unbelievable to see her so misjudged! — Take me from you! I've never gone there but she's asked me why you did n't come. She still sends you flowers pretty well every day. Those are hers, I see. I'm glad that you've deigned to put them in water."

The tall sheaf of carnations, white and rose and yellow, that stood in a jug on a shelf in the studio must, evidently, have come from Mrs. Dallas's garden. No other person grew such carnations. The garden at Ashleigh Lodge, this pleasant country house that they had taken for the six summer months, was not its strong point, and Mrs. Dallas had kept them reinforced from her abundance. Rupert associated the carnations, their soft and glowing colours, their formal grace and spicy sweetness, with the whole growth of his devotion to Mrs. Dallas. He fixed his indignant eyes on them now.

"Of course I put them into water. I am going to arrange them and take them into the drawing-room presently," said Marian with her hateful calm. "But they give me no more pleasure. Nor does she. She is like them. They are heartless flowers and she is a heartless woman. I see quite plainly now what I did n't see before. She's that type, — the smiling, calculating siren. She lives for admiration; she's herself only when she has some one at her feet, and she's seen to it that you

should be, — though I'm bound to say that you have n't made it difficult for her. It fits in with all the stories."

Rupert, at this, turned away and went out. He thrust his hat firmly down on his fair locks and swung his stick as he strode by the little footpath through the woods. Bitter disappointment with Marian surged in him, and hot anger, but above all an atoning tenderness that seemed almost to break his heart in its longing to protect and justify the woman so traduced by her. His head throbbed and drummed as he went. To have it come to this! To have such hands laid on it — their love! their silent, hidden love! That Mrs. Dallas returned his love he seemed to see, with many other things, clearly, rapturously, if with trembling, for the first time to-day. He saw it with Marian's unworthiness; Marian's unworthiness had shown it to him; and now, exulting, he claimed it. She loved him, veiling the depth in her vagueness, her aloofness, her indulgent irony. His mind retraced, with yearning gratitude, the steps of their relationship. No one had ever been to him what she was. How she helped and lifted him! How juvenile and undiscriminating in their happy acceptances were Marian's appreciations of his work beside Mrs. Dallas's half-idle comments. He had read through to her, in manuscript, all his last novel; and Marian had not seen it yet. He had not wanted to read it to Marian; and she, besides, had been very busy with her painting.

Mrs. Dallas had listened to the novel almost every day, sitting in the shade of her veranda, in her white dress, with the hands that, unless she were gardening, seemed always exquisitely idle, yet

that in their idleness seemed to dream and smile; — he could see the white skin, the delicate finger-tips, the pearls and rubies slipping down, and his heart contracted with a pang and ecstasy as he saw himself holding her hand, kissing it. He must kiss it, to-day, and he must tell her. For she needed him; he was sure of it. She needed him terribly. If she lifted him, yet how much, too, he could lift her, out of the lethargic shallows and sullen quagmires of her life.

She could not be happy with her husband. He felt himself shut his eyes before the retrospect of what the disenchantments and disasters must be that lay behind her. If she had taken great risks, with that heart of highest courage he divined in her, if she had faced great sacrifices for her present husband, what wonder that her loveliness was now clouded by that irony and languor? She was not kind to Colonel Dallas; he could not hide from himself that she was not kind to him; but, as he owned it, he yearned over her with a deeper comprehension of tenderness, feeling his rights the greater. How could she be kind to the selfish, complaining, elegant old man? — for, to Rupert, Colonel Dallas's fifty-five years seemed old. She never said anything actually sharp or disagreeable to him — even when he was at his most fretful and tiresome; but when he was least so she was not any the kinder, and by her glances, by the inflections of her cool and indolent voice in answering him, she displayed to the full, to others and to himself, did he take the pains to see it, how dull and how tiresome she found him. No; she was like a weary, naughty child in this; and seeing her as a child, with a child's faults — and did it not prove how unblinded his love

must be that he should see it? — he felt himself fold her to his heart in a tenderness more than a lover's; a paternal passion was in it; he had known that it must be in true love; he had said so in one of his books. How his books would grow from his knowledge of her!

II

He had now passed through the woods and crossed the road and entered the footpath that ran down to Woodlands, the small house encircled by birch and fir woods where, for now some four or five years, the Dallases had pitched their errant tent. One could reach it, also, by the road; but Rupert always took this short cut that brought him out at a little gate opening on the upper lawn. There was an upper and a lower lawn at Woodlands; on the upper Colonel Dallas had a putting-green; the lower was a tiny square surrounded by Mrs. Dallas's beds of carnations. Rupert, when he emerged upon the putting-green, could look down past the red-tiled roofs and the white rough-cast walls of the house at the carnations, massed in their appointed colours — from deep to palest rose, from fawn and citron to snowy white — among flagged paths.

Mrs. Dallas had told him, in one of her infrequent moments of communicativeness, that during years of wandering as a soldier's wife — her first husband, also, had been a soldier — she had come to be known as the woman who could make things grow anywhere. She had grown flowers in sands and marshes. She had snatched it might be but the one season of fulfilment from the most temporary

of sojournings — in China, in India, in Africa. Sometimes only bulbs would grow; sometimes only roses; but what she tried for, always, and had never attained in more perfection than at Woodlands, was carnations. They were her favourite flower and they atoned to her here, she said, for living in a house that made her always think of an ornamental bottle of some popular dentifrice, so red and white, so fresh and spick and span, and with such a well-advertised air, was Woodlands. Her carnations were the only things of which he had ever heard her speak with feeling. Rupert, as he looked down at them from the upper lawn and descended the stone steps, felt his heart beating violently.

A veranda ran along the front of Woodlands, and Mrs. Dallas was sitting on it, just outside her drawing-room windows. The shaded depths of the room behind her glimmered here and there with the half-drowned brightness of crystal, porcelain, lacquer, — the things, none very good but all rather charming, that she had picked up for a song in the course of her wanderings; and she sat there, rather like a siren indeed, at the mouth of her cavern, its treasures seeming to shine in the translucent darkness behind her as if through water. Rupert, remembering and accepting the simile, saw her as a siren, a creature of poetry and romance, though he recognized that her poetry, like her romance, was hidden from the ordinary observer. Even to his eyes she always appeared first and foremost as a woman of extreme fashion, and his other perceptions of her were tinged with the half-tormenting, half-delicious pungency of this one, for Rupert had known till now no women of fashion.

He had passed his youth, until going to Oxford, in a provincial town, where his father, an admirable and sagacious man, was a hard-worked doctor; and his only glimpses of society had been in his encounters, always displeasing to him, with Marian's tiresome and conventional kinsfolk and the few haphazard contacts in London that came in the way of a young writer. Mrs. Dallas might embody poetry and romance, but she also embodied luxury and the exercised and competent economy that made it possible. She might have to live in small, gimcrack Woodlands and do without a motor; but she had her maid. The slices of bacon at breakfast were carefully computed; but the coffee was of the best and blackest.

To-day, as always when he had seen her, she seemed ready for any possible social emergency. She could have stepped from her veranda, with those wonderfully cut little white shoes, into the smartest of garden-parties, or have received in her shimmering cavern the unexpected visit of a royal personage; and her soft white linen with its heavy Italian embroideries clotted, like thick cream, about the hem and wrists and breast, would have been as exquisitely appropriate as it was to this empty afternoon of reverie.

She was a small, very shapely woman, soft and curved and compact. Her coiffure would have looked old-fashioned in its artifice and elegance, and with its "royal fringe," were it not for its air of a rightness as unquestionable as that of some foreign princess's, who kept and did not follow fashions. Mrs. Dallas's face, too, was small and colourless and slightly faded; her hair was of a lighter brown than her arched eyebrows and her melancholy and

dissatisfied eyes; her eyelids, tinged with a dusky mauve, drooped heavily and made her always look a little sleepy; the smiling line of her full-lipped yet minute mouth was ironic rather than mirthful. To have called it a bewitching or an alluring face would have been to imply a mobility it did not possess; but it was potent through its very passivity; it was provocative through its profound and slumbrous indifference.

There was certainly no hint of allurement in the glance she turned on Rupert Wilson as he came round the corner of the veranda; it was, indeed, even to his rapt preoccupation, a little harder in its quiet attentiveness than usual; yet she smiled at him, and her smile was always sweet, holding out a languid hand in silence and leaving it to him to say, "You expected me."

It was hardly a question, and Mrs. Dallas gave it no answer. He had, indeed, come to see her every day for many weeks now. But yesterday had finished the novel, and to-day was almost the first they had had without some definite programme of reading.

Rupert sat down on the steps of the veranda at her feet and took off his hat and looked out across the carnations; and since she said nothing, he, too, was silent, and to his trembling young heart the silence was full of new avowals.

Colonel Dallas's smoking-room also opened on the veranda, and as they sat there he came out. He was a tall, heavy man, with large pale cheeks drooping on either side of a white moustache, and a gloomy eye that could become fretful. He cast now a glance that was only gloomy at his wife and her companion.

"Beastly hot day," he said, to her rather than to Rupert. "It's worse in the house than out, I think."

"Are you going over to the Trotters' for tea and croquet?" his wife inquired.

"To the Trotters'? Why should I go to the Trotters'?"

"They asked you, and you accepted."

"Well, I certainly don't feel inclined to endure that broiling walk for the sake of *les beaux yeux* of Madame Trotter *et filles*. It's a dull neighbourhood, this, but the Trotters are, perhaps, when all's done and told, the dullest people in it."

"You've always seemed to get on particularly well with them, I've thought," said Mrs. Dallas, in the voice that when it seemed considerate could contrive to be most disparaging. "It's a pity not to go. You need a walk. You can't afford Carlsbad this year, you know."

"I need hardly be reminded of that," said Colonel Dallas, and now it was fretfully. "To run the risk of apoplexy on the road and to drink the Trotters' foul Indian tea is hardly an equivalent. No; I shall practise some putting shots, and perhaps, if it gets cooler towards evening, I'll go over to the links. The Trotters can manage without me. — What time do the Varleys arrive?"

"At seven-thirty. There's no other train they could arrive by, as far as I'm aware."

The colonel looked at his watch, drew his hat down over his eyes, and went slowly away round the corner of the house.

His wife's eyes did not follow him, nor, it was evident, her thoughts.

"It has been rather oppressive, hasn't it?" said

Rupert, glancing up at her. "You have n't been feeling it too much, I hope."

"Not at all. I like it. I think it's only people who don't know how to be quiet who mind the heat," said Mrs. Dallas. "This is the one time of the year that one can sit out of doors in a thin dress, and I am very grateful for it." Even about small things Mrs. Dallas always seemed to have her mind quite made up. Her likes and dislikes, for all the inertness of her demeanour, were clear and unshifting. She sometimes made Rupert feel himself amorphous, vague, uncertain; and this feeling, though blissful, had yet its sting of sadness and anxiety.

"Well, some people are n't able to be quiet, are they?" he observed. "On a day like this I always think of people in factories, — great, roaring, clanking places with the sun gnawing at their iron roofs, — and the pale, moist faces, the monotonously rapid hands."

"Do you?" said Mrs. Dallas. She often said that, in that tone, when he gave expression to some enthusiasm or sympathy. She did not make him feel snubbed, but always, when she said, "Do you?" she made him feel young again, a little bewildered and a little sad. He imagined, to explain it in her, that people's thoughts did not interest her, her woman's intuition probing below their thoughts to their personalities. It was he, himself, with his heart full of devotion, that interested Mrs. Dallas. Yet it was not of him that she next spoke. "How is Marian?" she asked. "Is she painting to-day?"

He was aware that his face altered and that his colour rose. He had to steady something, in his

glance and in his voice, the pressure of his new consciousness was so great, as he answered, "Yes, she's been painting all the morning."

"I have n't seen her for some days now," Mrs. Dallas remarked.

"No." The longing in him to confide in her, to pour out his grief and his devotion, was so strong that for the moment he could find only the simple negative.

"I quite miss Marian," Mrs. Dallas added.

He looked down at the little foot placed on a cushion beside him, and he said, "You've always been so kind, so charming to Marian." He remembered Marian's words with a deepened wrath and tenderness.

"Have I? I'm glad you think so. It's been very easy," said Mrs. Dallas.

A silence fell.

"May I talk to you?" Rupert jerked out suddenly. "May I tell you things I've been feeling? I have been feeling so much — about you — about myself. — I long to tell you."

"By all means tell me," said Mrs. Dallas with great placidity; and one could see that she had often made the same sort of reply to the same sort of appeal.

"You know what you have been to me," said Rupert, turning on the step so that he could look up at her. "You know how it's all grown — beautifully, inevitably. No one has ever been to me what you are."

Mrs. Dallas's sleepy eyes rested on him, and her delicate nostrils, slightly dilating, might have been, though without excitement, inhaling a familiar incense.

"I do love you so much," said Rupert in a trembling voice, gazing at her; "I do love you. You understand what I mean. You know me now and you could n't misunderstand. I want to serve you. I want to help you. I want you to lean on me and trust me — to let me be everything to you that I can." And as he spoke he stretched out his hand and laid it on her hands folded in her lap.

Mrs. Dallas let it lie there, and she looked back at him, not moved, apparently, but a little grave. "No, I don't think I misunderstand your feeling," she said after a moment. "Of course I've seen it plainly."

"Yes, yes, I knew you did. — And that you accepted it, — dearest — loveliest — best." He had drawn her hand to him now and he pressed his lips upon it. And as he kissed Mrs. Dallas's hand, as that imagined happiness was consummated, he felt his mind cloud suddenly, as if in a cloud of fragrance, and, thought sinking away from him, he knew only an aching sweetness, the white, warm hand against his lips, the darkness of the glimmering room near by, and the scent of the carnations, exhaling their spices in the hot sunshine. Closing his eyes, he breathed quickly. And above him, a little paler, Mrs. Dallas, for a moment, as if with the conscious acceptance of a familiar ritual, also closed her eyes and breathed in, with the scent of her carnations, the immortal fragrance of the youth and passion that, to her, could soon no longer come. "Dear boy!" she murmured.

They heard the step of Colonel Dallas descending from the upper lawn. Rupert drew back sharply; Mrs. Dallas softly replaced her hand

upon the other in her lap. Her husband appeared, and he looked very fretful.

"The sun is quite tropical. It's impossible to play in it. We don't get a breath of air down in this hole." He took out his watch — Colonel Dallas was always taking out his watch. "What time is tea?" he asked.

"At five o'clock, as usual, I suppose," said his wife.

"It's only just past four," said the colonel, with the bitterly resigned air of one who loses a wager he had hardly hoped to win. "I shall go to the Trotters'. It's better than being baked in this oven. Their lawn is shaded at all events." He spoke as if there had been some attempt to dissuade him from the alleviations of the Trotters' lawn.

"I don't know why you did n't go half an hour ago," said his wife. "You've so often discovered that the sun is tropical on the upper lawn at this hour." And as the colonel moved off she added, "Just tell them that I'll have lemon-squash instead of tea, will you?"

It was a rather absurd little interlude; yet it had its point, its appropriateness; it fitted in with those thoughts of succour, and Rupert tried, now, to recover them, saying, after the gate had closed upon the colonel and keeping still at his little distance, "Are you very unhappy?"

How he was to help Mrs. Dallas except by loving her and coming to see her every day and being allowed to kiss her and hold her hand he did not clearly know, but it seemed the moment for returning to those offers of service. He did not attempt to regain her hand. Mingling with the rap-

ture, when the kiss and the scent of the carnations had blurred his mind, there was also a sense of fear. He was different; and there was more in his love than he had known.

"Very unhappy? Not more than most people, I suppose. Why?" Mrs. Dallas asked. Her tone was changed. Her moment of diffusion, of languor and acceptance, was gone by.

"Why?" Rupert felt the change and the question hurt him. "When that's your life? — This?"

"By that, do you mean my husband?" Mrs. Dallas inquired kindly. "He's not my life. As for this — if you mean my situation and occupation — having love made to me by a pleasant young man while I smell carnations, I can assure you that there's nothing I enjoy much more."

She did more than hurt him now; she astonished him. "Don't!" he breathed. It was as if something beautiful were being taken from him. Instinctively he stretched out his hand for hers and again she gave it; but now she looked clearly at him, a touch of malice in her smile, though her smile was always sweet.

"Don't what?"

"Don't pretend to be hard — flippant. Don't hide from me. Give yourself to the real beauty that we have found."

"I have just said that I enjoy it."

"Enjoy is not the word," said Rupert, in a low voice, looking down at the hand in his. "It's an initiation. A dedication."

"A dedication? To what?" Mrs. Dallas asked, and even more kindly; yet her kindness made her more removed.

Her words seemed to strike with soft yet bruising blows upon his heart. "To life. To love," he answered.

"And what about Marian?" Mrs. Dallas inquired. And now, still gently, she withdrew her hand and leaned her cheek on it as, her elbow on the cushions of her chair, she bent her indolent but attentive gaze upon him. "I should have thought that dedication lay in that direction."

His forehead was hot and his eyes, hurt, bewildered, indignant, challenged hers yet supplicated, too. "Please don't let me think that I'm to hear mean conventionalities from you — as I have from Marian. You know," he said, and his voice slightly shook, "that dedication is n't a limiting, limited thing. You've read my books and cared for them, and understood them, — better, you made me feel, that I did myself, — so that you must n't pretend to forget. Love does n't shut out. It widens."

"Does it?" said Mrs. Dallas. "And what," she added, "were the mean conventionalities you heard from Marian? I've been wondering about Marian."

"She is jealous," said Rupert shortly, looking away. "I could hardly believe it, but she made it too plain. It seemed to take the foundation-stones of our life away to hear her. It made all our past, all the things I believed we shared, seem illusory. It made me feel that the Marian I'd loved and trusted was a stranger."

Mrs. Dallas contemplated his averted face, and as she heard him her glance altered. It withdrew itself; it veiled itself; it became at once less kind and more indolent. "And you really don't think

Marian has anything to complain of?" she inquired presently.

"No, I do not," said Rupert. "Nothing is taken from her."

"Is n't it? And if I became your mistress, would you still think she had nothing to complain of?" Mrs. Dallas asked the question in a tone of detached and impartial inquiry.

How far apart in the young man's experience were theory and practice was manifested by the hot blush that sprang to his brow, the quick stare in which an acute eye might have read an ingenuous and provincial dismay. "My mistress?" he stammered. "You know that such a thought never entered my head."

"Has n't it? Why not?"

"You know I only asked to serve — to help — to care for you."

"You would think it wrong, then, to be unfaithful, technically, to your wife?"

"Wrong?" His brow showed the Saint-Bernard-puppy knot of perplexity. "It's not a question of wrong. Wrongness lies only in the sort of love. Real love is sacred in all its expressions of itself; my ideal of love, just because it includes that one, can do without it."

"But, on your theory, why should it do without it?" Mrs. Dallas, all mildness, inquired.

His mind was driven back to those questionings in the studio, when he had thought of the incongruous yet allied themes of passion and perambulators, and groped again, angrily, in the same obscurity. "It's — it's — a matter of convenience," he found, frowning; "it — it would n't work in with other beautiful things. It would n't be convenient."

"I'm glad to hear you find such a reasonable objection," said Mrs. Dallas. "There could hardly be a better one. It would n't be at all convenient. Though, I gather, if it could be made convenient, you still think that Marian would have nothing to complain of."

"I don't know why you are trying to pin me down like this." Rupert, stooping, gathered some flakes of stone from the path and scattered them with a sharp gesture that expressed his exasperation. "You know what I believe. Love is free, free as air and sunshine. How can one stop one's self from loving? Why should one? And if our love, yours and mine, could mean that complete relation, then, yes, the ideal thing, the really ideal thing, would be for Marian to feel it right and beautiful and to be glad that there should be two perfected and complete relations instead of one. As it is, that inclusive vision is n't asked of her."

"She's not, in fact, to be asked to be a Mormon," Mrs. Dallas remarked. "All that she has to put up with is that her husband should be in love, platonically, with another woman, and should have ceased to be in love with her. It's hard, you know, when some one has been in love with you, to give it up."

"But I have not ceased to love Marian!" Rupert cried. "Why should you suppose it? My love for you does n't shut out my love for her. It's a vulgar old remnant of sexual savagery to think it does. A mother does n't love one child the less for loving another. Why can't people purify and widen their minds by looking at the truth? — That jeer about Mormons is unworthy of you. Marriage is a prison unless husband and wife are both free to go

on giving and growing. What does love mean but growth?"

Mrs. Dallas's eyes had drifted away to her beds of carnations and they now rested on them for a little while. Rupert took up his hat and fanned himself. He was hot, and very miserable.

"It always strikes me, when I hear talk like yours," said Mrs. Dallas presently, "that it is so much less generous and noble than it imagines itself to be. It's the man, only, who frames the new code and the man, only, who is to enlarge himself and run two or three loves abreast."

"Not at all. Marian is precisely as free as I am to love somebody else as well as me."

"As free? Oh no," said Mrs. Dallas, laughing softly. "Theoretically, perhaps, but not actually. Nature has seen to that. When women have babies and lose their figures it's most unlikely that they'll ever be given an opportunity to exercise their freedom. That fact in itself should make you reconsider your ideas about love. Own frankly that they apply only to men and don't pretend to generosity. The only free women are the *femmes galantes;* and you'll observe that they are seldom burdened with a nursery, and that they never grow fat."

She touched, with an accuracy malignant in its clairvoyance, his subconscious awareness of Marian's physical alteration. Something in him shrank away from her in fear and indignation. She was trying to make him see things from a false and petty standpoint, the standpoint of a woman of the world, a mere woman of the world — that world of shameful tolerances and cruel stupidities. "I don't know anything about *femmes*

galantes," he said, "nor do I wish to. You misunderstand me if you think that by love I mean sensuality."

With slightly lifted brows she looked out at the carnations; and had she been angry with him he could have felt less angry with her. He was, indeed, very angry with her when she remarked, tranquilly, "I don't think you know what you mean by love."

"I mean by love what Shelley meant by it," Rupert declared.

> "True love in this differs from gold and clay,
> That to divide is not to take away.
> Love is like understanding that grows bright
> Gazing on many truths.

"I mean what all the true, great hearts of the world have meant by it, — poetry, rapture, religion; and they can only be sustained, renewed, created, by emotion, by passion, by sexual passion — if you like to call it by a name you imagine to be derogatory." He felt himself warmed and sustained against the menace that emanated from her by the sound of his own familiar eloquence.

But Mrs. Dallas still tranquilly contemplated the carnations.

"That's the man's point of view. The view of the artist, the creator. Perhaps there's truth in it. Perhaps he can't write his poems and paint his pictures without taking intoxicants. But it will never be the view of the woman. Mary Shelley will never really like it when Shelley makes love to Jane Clairmont; Marian will never like it when you make love to me. They'll try to believe it's the ideal, to please him, when they are the ones he

is in love with; but when he is in love with other women they won't go on believing."

"That is their fault, their littleness, then. The wide, glorious outlook is theirs, too, if they choose to open their eyes. I don't accept your antithesis for women, — humdrum respectability, roast mutton, milk pudding, or dissipation. I don't believe that when a woman marries and becomes a mother she must turn her back on love."

Mrs. Dallas at this began to laugh, unkindly. "Turn her back on love? No indeed. Why should she? Has n't she her husband and children, to say nothing of her friends, her father and mother, her sisters and brothers? You idealists seem always to forget these means of expansion. By love you mean simply and solely the intoxicant. Call it poetry and religion, if you like, but don't expect other people, who merely see that you are intoxicated, to call it that."

He sat, trying to think. Idly, half absently, with languid fingers, she seemed to be breaking his idols as though they had been silly little earthenware figures, not good enough — here was the stab, the bewilderment — for her drawing-room. And who was she to do it, this remote, mysterious creature, steeped in the perfume of her passionate past? He felt as he gazed at her that it was not only himself he must defend against her.

"It's curious to me to hear you talk in this way." He armed himself, as he spoke, with all that he could muster of wisdom and of weight. "You are the last woman I'd have expected to hear it from. You've made me your friend, so that I'd have a right to be frank, even if you had n't let me love you. What right have you to turn your back

on all the beauty and romance of life — to smile at them and mock them? *You* have n't allowed yourself to be bandaged and crippled by convention, I'm sure of it. You have followed your heart — bravely, truly — out into life. You have loved — and loved — and loved — I know it. It breathes from you. It's all you've lived for."

"And you think the result so satisfactory?" said Mrs. Dallas. She looked at him now, and if it was with irony it was with sadness. She turned from her question. "Well, if you like, I am one of the *femmes galantes;* they are of many types, you know; I was n't thinking, when I shocked you so, of the obvious, gross type. I was thinking of the woman who corresponds to you — the idealist, the spiritual *femme galante.* And, I'm convinced of it, for a woman, it does n't work. A man, if he is a big man, or has a big life, — it is n't always the same thing by the way, — may have his succession of passions, or, as you'd claim, — and I don't believe it, — his contemporaneities; he has a context to frame them in; they may fall into place. But a woman's life can't be calculated in those terms of dimension. It is big enough for the emotion that leads to marriage and to the loves that grow from that, the loves you think so little of. It is an emotion that can't be repeated over and over again, simply because, in a normal life, it has grown into something else, something even better, I should say: a form of poetry and rapture and religion quite compatible with roast mutton and respectability. But the women who miss the normal life and who try to live on the emotions, they — well, I can only say that to my mind they always come to look silly. Silly is the only word for them."

He stared at her. "You don't look silly."

"Why should I?" Mrs. Dallas asked. "I'm not of the idealist type. I don't confuse intoxication with religion and think I have the one when I've only the other. I may have missed the real thing, but I've not repeated the emotion that ought to lead to it. You are quite mistaken in imagining that I've loved and loved and loved. I have n't. I have allowed other people to love me. That, as you 'll own, is a very different matter. I am hard and cold and disillusioned. I am not soft and yearning and frustrated. Why should I look silly?"

He stared at her, and his heart was flooded with pain. What was she, then? What was her feeling for him? What had she meant? As she spoke and as he looked at her, the veil of romance dissolved from about her and he saw her for the first time with her own eyes, — devoid of poetry, a hard, cold, faded, worldly woman. Yet she was still a Sphinx, strange and alluring, and still he struggled against her, for her, saying hotly, though his heart was chilled, "If it's true, you've hurt yourself — you've hurt yourself horribly, through fear of looking silly."

"No, I've not hurt myself," said Mrs. Dallas. "I've been hurt, perhaps; but I've not allowed my hurts to repeat themselves too often. Some things in life should be unique and final. The people who don't keep them so become shoddy. Marian, for instance, is neither hard nor cold, nor shoddy either. You have made one of the mistakes that idealists are always making in imagining that she was humdrum respectability and that I was poetry and rapture and religion. — Oh, it's no good protesting. If I had a double chin and thin hair you'd

never have wanted to help my soul, however unhappy I was. And if Marian had sat about in carefully chosen clothes and looked mysterious and not let you feel sure that she cared about you, you would probably have remained in love with her. So please own that you have been mistaken and that on the one side is love, the love that Marian feels for you, although she knows you; because she knows you; and on the other is illusion, intoxication, sensuality; yes, my dear Rupert, such as you felt when I let you kiss my hand a little while ago."

He sat, sullen, even sulky, half turned from her, and again he stooped and gathered up the flakes of stone and tossed them away down the path.

The clink and chink of ice and glass was heard approaching through the drawing-room, and the maid stepped out bearing the tray, which she set down on a wicker table before her mistress. The tall crystal jug, veiled in frosty rime, showed tones of jade and chalcedony, and fillets of lemon peel threaded it like pale, bright enamel. This gem-like beaker, the plate of golden cakes, with the scent of the carnations, with Mrs. Dallas's little foot on its cushion, with her rings of pearl and ruby, had all been part of the magic she had meant to him. The very sound of the ice, dully yet resonantly chinking, brought a suffocating sense of nostalgia. It was over, all over. He was disenchanted. She was cruel to him, to him who had loved her. She had cut into him and killed bright, ingenuous, trustful things. And, in a placid voice, she asked him if he would have some cake, and filled his glass.

He took it from her and drank it off in silence.

The icy, aromatic liquid seemed an antidote to that other intoxicant she had mocked. Irony flowed through his veins; a bitter-sweet sense of vengeful maturity. When he set down the glass, he looked up at her, and he felt himself measuring his sword against the stiletto of an adversary.

"Well, I've had my lesson," he said. "I've been a generous but deluded idealist, it seems, in imagining that men and women are equals in their claims on life. Since I'm an artist, I have a right to my raptures, I take it. And poor Marian must be jealous with reason. Well, well; it's an odd morality to hear preached."

Mrs. Dallas still sipped her lemonade and she quietly considered him. She said nothing, and even after she had finished and set down her glass she sat for still a little while in silence.

"I'm sorry I've seemed to preach," she then remarked, "and I certainly think that Marian has every reason to be jealous. What more did I say? That a man is n't as ridiculous and undignified as a woman when he falls in and out of love-affairs on the condition that he has a big life? That was it, was n't it?"

"That was it, and I'm glad to have your assurance that I am in no danger of being ridiculous or undignified."

"Do you mean," said Mrs. Dallas, looking at him, "that you think yours such a big life?"

It had been, before, his heart, its tenderness, its devotion and dedication, that she had cut into; it was into something deeper now, something more substantially and vitally at the centre of his life, something of which his heart and all its ardours were but tributaries. He was to learn that self-

love could bleed with a fiercer, darker gush. The blood, as if foretelling his ordeal, sprang to his forehead as he looked back at her.

"I have my art," he said, and he disdained any pretended humility; he spoke with pride and even with solemnity. "I live for my art. I don't think that I am an insignificant man."

"Don't you?" said Mrs. Dallas. It was with an unaffected curiosity that her eyes rested on him, and it sank into him, drop by drop, like poison. "Not insignificant, perhaps," she took up after a moment. "That's not quite the word, perhaps. You are very intelligent and appreciative and good-hearted. I don't suppose one can be quite insignificant if one is that. But — do you call it art, your writing? I wonder. Oh, you are quite right to live for it, of course, just as other men do for stock-broking or fox-hunting or print-collecting, or anything else that employs their energies or satisfies their tastes or brings in money; but, to count as art, a man's activities must mean more than just his own satisfaction in them, must n't they? You write careful, intelligent, sentimental little books; but I can't feel that the world would be any the poorer if you were to take to stock-broking or fox-hunting instead. No, it does n't seem to me, my dear Rupert, that your life is nearly large enough for a succession of love-affairs. It's all right when one is young and looking for a mate; experiments are in order then; but you've found your mate, and you'll soon be not so very young, and if on the strength of your art you imagine yourself entitled to unseasonable intoxications, you'll become, in time, an emotional dram-drinker, one of those foolish old inebriates we are all familiar with, and

you'll spoil yourself for what you were meant to be and can be, — a devoted husband and an excellent *père de famille.*"

Stretched on his rack, broken, bleeding, Rupert stared at her. Who was this woman, this cruel, ambiguous woman who watched his agony with deliberating, drowsy eyes? There came into his mind the memory of a picture seen in childhood, some sentimental print that had strongly impressed his boyish sensibilities. A corner of a Roman amphitheatre, a rising tier of seats; sham architecture, sham Romans, no doubt, and a poor piece of claptrap, looked back on from his maturity; but the face of the Roman woman, leaning so quietly forward under its gold tiara, to watch, unmoved, the tormented combatants below, was it not like this face? Yes, she was of that stony-hearted breed, unaltered by the centuries.

The torment of his humiliation snatched at anger for a veil. He said, smiling, "You have been very successful till now in concealing your real opinion of me."

"Have I concealed it?"

"My work certainly seemed to be of absorbing interest to you."

"I listened to it; yes."

"I did n't imagine you'd stoop to feign interest. I did n't imagine you'd take such pains to allure and flatter a commonplace young *père de famille.*"

"Did I take pains to allure and flatter him?"

"From the first! — From the very first! — That day we met! — My God!" Even now he could not help feeling himself, seeing himself, as one of his own heroes; and, for a moment, he bent his head upon his hands — as they would have done had a

calamity as unimaginable as this befallen them. "That first day! — The apple-blossoms framing you! You stood under your white parasol in our orchard — and you smiled at me!"

"I generally do at agreeable-looking young men when I see that they admire me," Mrs. Dallas commented.

"Oh, don't pretend! — Don't hide and shift!" He lifted fierce eyes. "It was n't only that. You seemed to care. You seemed to need me. You made it easy — inevitable. You came — and came; and you asked me here again and again."

"Not 'me,' — 'us,'" Mrs. Dallas amended suavely. She was looking at him, all this time, with that thoughtful, poisonous curiosity; and as he now sat, finding for the moment no words, his fury baffled by her quiet checkmating, she went on, "And afterwards I let you come alone because I saw that you admired me, and that is always pleasant to me. When, at first, as you say, I showed myself so affable, it was because I liked Marian. I do still like her; more than I ever liked you, my dear Rupert; if you are good-hearted and intelligent, she is more so, and she has more sense of humour than you have, and does n't take herself so seriously. And, to be quite frank, since we are talking it all out like this, I not only liked Marian, but saw that she could be of use to me. I've had, in some ways, a tiresome, tangled life, and things have n't always gone as I wanted them to go, so that I don't let opportunities for strengthening and straightening here and there pass me by. Through Marian I met several people I wanted to meet and make sure of. People useful to me. I think Marian quite understood and quite wanted

to help. She would. She is of my world in a sense you are n't, you know, my dear Rupert. And, in my idle way, I did take a good deal of trouble to be agreeable to her. It all turned out exceedingly well and I was very grateful to Marian. That's one reason, you see, why I felt to-day that our little flirtation was going too far and must be put a stop to. I don't want Marian to be jealous of me; it would be distinctly inconvenient. But there is more in it than that. I would n't have put myself to this bother and talked things out like this if it had n't been because of my liking for Marian. It makes me angry to see that you don't know how lucky you are to have such a wife. I want you to see how very lucky you are. I want you to see yourself as others see you, — a very unimportant young man, without position and without money, married to a quite unusually delightful girl who has both. This is n't the young man's fault, of course; one would n't like him the less for it; but one does expect him to be aware of his own felicity. One does expect him to feel that, at present, his wife is too good for him. I don't mean in the conventional sense; one would n't ask him to recognize that; but in the sense of worth and charm and distinction, for those are the things he supposes himself to care for."

She had, while she spoke of the "young man" thus impartially, turned her eyes from him, and they rested again on the beds of carnations. The sun had sunk behind the hill, and though the bright soft colours were unshadowed, they all lay in a different light and seemed to glow coolly in their own radiance, like jewels.

Rupert rose. His anger had passed from him.

He no longer felt Mrs. Dallas to be an antagonist; but he felt her to be a stranger; and he felt himself to be a stranger. A sense of fear and loneliness and disembodiment had fallen upon him while he listened to her. He held out his hand to her. "Good-bye," he said. "I think I must be going."

She took his hand and looked up at him with the gaze so remote, so irrevocable. "Good-bye," she said; "I hope to see you and Marian some day soon, perhaps."

The words, with their quiet relapse on convention, made him feel himself in a new world. He had been thinking of final, fatal things, things dark and trenchant; she showed him compromise, continuity, commonplace good sense; and, dispossessed, bereft as he was, something in him struggled to place itself beside her in this alien atmosphere, to make itself a denizen of the new since he had forever lost the old world.

"Oh yes, I'll tell her," he said. And as he released her hand he found, "Thank you. I'm sure you meant it all most kindly."

"It's very nice of you to say so," said Mrs. Dallas, smiling.

It was the world of convention; yet with all his bewildered groping for clues and footholds, he felt, dimly, as a glimmer before his eyes or a frail thread in his hands, that the smile was perhaps the most sincerely sweet that he had ever had from Mrs. Dallas. It was as if she saw his struggle and commended it.

III

He walked away, up the steps, across the putting-green and out into the woods. He went slowly as

he began the gradual ascent. He felt very tired, as though he had been beaten with rods, and there was in him a curious mingling of confusion and lucidity, of pain and contemplation. The present and the future were curtained with shame, uncertainty, and dismay; but the past was vivid, and, like a singular, outgrown husk, he seemed to look back at that Rupert on the veranda, so blind, so bland, so fatuous, and to see him as Mrs. Dallas had seen him.

Beyond the curtain was Marian. He knew that he went towards Marian as if towards safety and succour; yet all was opaque before his eyes, for who was it that Marian was to succour but that fatuous Rupert? and was it for such as he that he could seek support? How could he go to Marian and say, "I have been given eyes to see you as you are; help me, now, to be blind again to what I am." No; he could not, if he were to follow his glimmer and hold his thread, seek succour from Marian.

When he reached the house he went into the drawing-room and found her sitting there in a cool dress, a book upon her knee. She did not see him as he entered quietly and he stood for some moments in the doorway looking at her.

She had been crying; her cheeks were white and her eyelids heavy; but though this perception came to him with a blow of feeling, it did not, for the moment, move him from his contemplation of her, with all that it brought of new and strange to the familiar.

She was strange, though she was not a stranger, as he had become to himself. He noted the black curves of her hair, the ample line of her bosom, the gentle, white maternal hand laid along the

book. On a cabinet, above her head, he saw that she had very beautifully arranged the white, rose and yellow carnations. It was like her to do this justice to her rival's gift; like her to place them there not only faithfully but beautifully. And as she sat, unaware of him, in the luminous evening air, he felt her to be full of enchantment and this enchantment to centre in the hand laid along the book. His eyes fixed themselves on the hand. It seemed a symbol of the Marian of grace and girlhood whom he had loved with such ardent presage of eternal faith, and of this Marian sitting quietly in her saddened and accepted life, not changed except in so far as she was yet more worthy of fidelity. He saw that she had passed through her ordeal and transcended it; he saw that she would never again show him jealousy; and he saw that as the old Marian he had, perhaps, forever lost her. A lover must always show jealousy. This was a wife, maternal and aloof.

He came into the room and she looked round at him. Her eyes, altered by weeping, were mild and alien. They were without hostility, without accusation; deliberating, gentle; the eyes of a wife. "Did you have a nice afternoon?" she asked laying down her book. "It's been delicious, has n't it?"

Quite as irrevocably as Mrs. Dallas she made the world that he must enter. She, too, in her different way, a way founded on acceptance rather than rejection, showed him compromise and continuity. And nothing that Mrs. Dallas had said to him cut into him so horribly as to see Marian show him this new world.

An impulse came to fall on his knees beside her, bury his head in her lap, and pour out all his

griefs. But already, and for Marian's sake, now, he had learned a better wisdom. To fall and weep and confess would be, again, to act like one of his own heroes; and Marian, in her heart, knew all that there was to know of that old Rupert. He must make her now know, and make himself know, a new Rupert.

He sat down opposite her and, smiling a little, he said, "Mrs. Dallas has done with me."

"Done with you!" Marian repeated. Her faint colour rose.

"Quite," said Rupert, nodding; "in any way I'd thought she had me."

"Do you mean," said Marian, after a moment, "that she's been horrid to you?"

"Not in the least, though it felt horrid. She merely let me see that I'd been mistaken."

"Mistaken? In what way?"

"In almost every way. In my ideas about myself, and about life, and about her. — It was n't, for one thing, me she liked in particular, at all. It was you."

Marian's flush had deepened. "She seemed to like you very much indeed."

"Only frivolously; not seriously. She showed me to-day how silly I'd been to think it anything but frivolous. She made me see that I'd been a serious ass."

Marian sat looking at him. She was startled, and on his behalf — wonderful maternal instinct! — she was angry; yet — he saw it all in the sweet, subtle alteration of her face — she was happy, half incredulously yet marvelously happy. And as he saw her happiness, tears came to Rupert's eyes and he felt himself, deeply and inarticulately, blessing Mrs.

Dallas. She had been right. This was something "even better."

"She's an exceedingly clever woman," he said, smiling at Marian, though she must see the tears. "And an exceedingly first-rate woman, too. And I'll always be grateful to her. The question is," — he got up and came and stood over his wife, — "I've been such an ass, darling. Can you forgive me?"

He had found her hand as he questioned her and he held it now up to his cheek closing his eyes, how differently!

IV

Mrs. Dallas, after her young friend had left her, sat on for quite a long while on the veranda. The concentration of her recent enterprise effaced itself from her eyes and lips. Her glance, steeping itself again in indolent and melancholy retrospects, fell into a reverie. Once or twice, putting up a languid hand, she yawned.

When the whole garden lay in coolness, she went in and got her gardening apron and gloves and basket of implements. It was an ideal moment for layering her carnations. Tripping out again on her little high-heeled shoes, she placed her kneeling-mat before a splendid plant and set to work. She scorned complicated aids. A box of long hairpins were her chief allies, and a sharp knife. Deftly she selected a blue-gray shoot and stripped the narrow leaves, sharply cut a transverse slit into the tender stalk, firmly bent and pinned the half-severed spray into the heaped earth where it was to make new roots and establish itself in a new life. And, as she did so, her mind reverting to thoughts of Rupert

and of her rough usage of him, a simile came to her that made her smile, her hard and not unkindly smile. She did not regret it, though unquestionably she had had her own moment of reluctance and of loss. It had hurt him terribly, no doubt, as, if they had feeling, it must now hurt her carnations to be cut and bent and pinned. But "It might be the making of him," Mrs. Dallas thought.

STAKING A LARKSPUR

IS a matter of fact (one has often to take one's stand on fact when thinking about Vera), it's I who am the gardener; it's I, that is to say, who draw the plans and compute the cost and give the orders and see that the men carry them out. I often lend a hand at carrying them out, too, for I love planting seedlings and staking plants and tweaking out weeds here and there when I've the chance. That wonderful blue border Vera had on the south terrace last summer, — it was just going over when the war broke out, — I put in all the new blue larkspurs myself, three hundred of them, — the larkspurs that Mrs. Thornton was to remind me of, — and I designed and planted and with my own hands helped to lay out the dream-garden, Vera's special garden. It was she, certainly, who had had the idea, standing on the site of the little, old, abandoned sunken garden in its circle of stone wall and cypresses, and saying, "I see a dream-garden here, Judith; a place where one can come and sit alone and dream dreams." She often has charming ideas, Vera, but she knows nothing about gardening. I sound already as if I were crabbing her, I know; and perhaps I am. Certainly I never think of her

relation to her garden without a touch of irony, and this story, which begins in the dream-garden, is n't to her advantage. It was there that I felt my first definite irascibility in regard to Vera and little Mrs. Thornton, and felt the impulse, as far as I was able, to take Mrs. Thornton under my wing.

It's a rather clipped and confined wing, and yet I can do pretty much as I choose at Compton Dally; I don't quite know why, for Vera does n't exactly like me. Still, she does n't dislike me, and I think she's a little bit afraid of me; for I am as definite and determined as a pair of garden shears, and my silence is often only the good manners of the dependant, and Vera knows it.

I am her cousin, an impecunious cousin, my mother a sister of her father's, old Lord Charleyford, who died last year. Vera herself was very impecunious until she married Percival Dixon; impecunious, but always very lovely and very clever, and she was on the crest of every wave, always, and never missed anything, except ready money and a really good offer, even before Percival Dixon came along — he came *via* South Africa — and gave her all the money that even she could spend, and bought back Compton Dally for her. Compton Dally had been in the family for hundreds of years, and it was our grandfather, Vera's and mine, who had ruined us all and finally sold it. It was everything for Vera to get it back, even if she had to take Percival Dixon with it; and I confess that for Compton Dally I could almost have taken Percival Dixon myself; but not quite, even for Compton Dally.

Well, she has always been fairly decent to me; not as decent as she might have been, certainly,

but more decent than I, at all events, expected, whatever may have been poor mother's hopes and indignations. I always thought mother unfair; there was no reason why Vera should go out of her way to give me a good time, and it showed some real consideration in her to have suggested, when mother died and while Jack was reading for the bar, that, until he and I could set up housekeeping in London together, I should come and be her companion and secretary and general odd-job woman; and for people like Vera to show any consideration is creditable to them. I am five years older than Jack, and our plan has always been to live together. I intend, of course, — though Jack at present does n't, dear lamb! — that he shall marry; but until then I'm to live with him and take care of him and help him with his work. All this if he ever comes back again. He is fighting at the front as I write, so that it remains to be seen whether I'm to go on always with Vera. If Jack does n't come back I shan't find it more difficult than anything else. We have always been all in all to each other, he and I; but that is quite another story and one that will never be written. This one is neither about Jack nor me, but about Vera and her garden and little Mrs. Thornton and her husband and her clothes.

Vera had thrown open Compton Dally to wounded Tommies and wounded officers, and the Thorntons came in that way. He'd only been back from the Boulogne hospital for a week, was badly crippled, and had a very gallant record. Most of Vera's officers before this had been colonials who had no homes to go to. The Thorntons were n't colonials, but they had no home and were very

poor, so that the arrangement for them to spend six weeks or two months at Compton Dally while Captain Thornton got back his strength — as far as he was able to get it back, poor man! — seemed an admirable one.

They came on a hot June afternoon both very tired, while we were all having tea on the west terrace. The Tommies — there were over a dozen of them, with two Red Cross nurses to take care of them — had their tea in the billiard-room, which is made over to them for their games and meals and almost constant gramophone, and the accurate laughter of Harry Lauder is wafted out to us on various music-hall strains at most hours of the day. He was laughing loudly and richly as the Thorntons arrived. After tea Vera led them about the garden. Vera's garden is merely a part of her toilette, and plays almost as important a part as her clothes in her general introduction of herself; and that she intended to introduce herself gracefully to Captain Thornton was evident; and that I was to pilot Mrs. Thornton, I had known after Vera's glance at her imitation Panama hat, her blue linen skirt, of an obsolete cut and a bad one at that, and her white blouse, shrunken in washing. Vera placed her swiftly as dull and dowdy, and it was my part, always, to pilot the dowdy and the dull.

I don't mind that, however; even now, after three years of it, I always enjoy going over Compton Dally and the gardens with newcomers. It's such a beautiful old place, so grave and so serene, its splendid Tudor front lifted high on stone terraces, and its courts and corners behind breaking out into all sorts of unexpected and enchanting antiquities. It symbolizes, if you begin with the

Saxon arches in the cellars, the whole history of England, and means so much more than any person who has ever lived there, or who ever will live there, can ever mean. It's worth the sacrifice of generations of younger sons and myriads of marriageable daughters. What could they all do better than to keep it going? I always recalled this when I wondered how Vera could have married Percival Dixon, and felt almost as much satisfaction as she could feel in the fact that two robust little boys, still at their preparatory school, stood reassuringly behind her and Percival; the elder, too, a thorough Compton, with hardly a trail of Dixon apparent on his ingenuous young countenance. I have the whole history of Compton Dally at the tips of my fingers, and if people give me an opening and show that they care about it, I can talk to them for hours as I take them round, feeling, for my little part and share in it, that, even if Vera were n't as decent as she is, I should put up with a great deal to stay in it and take care of it.

We did n't go about the house to-day. The Thorntons saw the big herbaceous border and the rose-garden, the rock-garden, tinkling with its little rivulet, the moat, and the lime-tree alley; and then Vera, trailing her gossamer draperies along the flagged path between the cypresses, — for Vera, even at this epoch of shortened petticoats, manages always to trail, — murmured, as I've heard her murmur, when she's at Compton Dally, at least once a week, "And this is my dream-garden, where I come and sit alone and dream dreams."

She led Captain Thornton down among the cypress boughs. He had a splinted leg and an unaccustomed crutch, and found the steps a difficulty;

but Vera put a hand under his elbow and let him lean heavily on her shoulder, and he reached the dream-garden without, I hope, too many twinges.

It is really very lovely. I don't like hearing it called a dream-garden, naturally; but I do feel always, when I come into it, that it is like sinking into the stillness and magic of a happy dream. The gypsophila was n't out yet, but it made a mist, like drowsiness; white peonies, grey santolina, white roses and silver sea-thistle, the dreamy spires of white foxgloves, low, purple pansies, and tall irises, white and grey and purple — these, in their twilight colours, were massed against the grey stone walls, and there were four bay-trees in stone urns at the corners. The beautiful old stone seat (I found it in Brompton Road, but it might have been made for Compton Dally three hundred years ago in Italy) was heaped with grey and purple cushions. In the centre rose the fluent shaft of the fountain, falling, with a musical rustle and murmur into the stone basin where pale goldfish move among the water-lilies.

We sat down, and Vera went on to say, as always:

"The other gardens are for friends. I plan them for them. I see them there. This is for loneliness, for my very self; and to me it is the heart of the whole, as solitude should be the heart of life."

Vera, as a matter of fact (you see, the phrase recurs constantly), is never alone. If she is wan and strange and wistful, it is n't from dreaming dreams, but from not having enough sleep and doing five times too many things and seeing five times too many people in the day. Vera, too, I may say it here, is n't in the least an ass, though she may, on

occasions she finds suitable, talk like one. Occasions are often suitable, so that, as I once told her, she's in danger of making a habit of it. She looked at me, when I told her this, with the pausing, penetrating, ironic gaze she is so capable of, and finally, with a slight grimace, said, "I'll be careful, Judith."

I have moments of feeling fond of her and this was one of them. She is careful; I've very rarely heard her talk like an ass when the occasion was unsuitable; but so many people are stupid that these are rare, and I foresee that, as she gets on and sinks by degrees into the automatism that overtakes so many artificial people, it may become a habit, just as the touch of rouge on her pale lips is already becoming more emphasized.

Captain Thornton, I saw at once, as she did, — for she saw most things, — was not stupid; but he was very simple. There was a certain bewilderment on his handsome, sturdy face, wistfulness rather than delight, such as a soul newly arrived in Paradise might feel, unable to forget the passes of death and the companions left behind in suffering. He was n't forgetting; I felt that as I looked at him. So many of them forget. Vera, I am sure, hardly ever remembers what it all really means — all these wounded heroes. Perhaps it is natural that she should n't; she has no one near in it.

Captain Thornton gazed about him quietly, and from the garden looked back at the angel who had led him there. Of course Vera must have looked like an angel to him. I have n't described Vera, and she is difficult to describe. To say that she is pale and dark, with attenuated features and dwelling, melancholy eyes, is only the beginning of it.

Of course she is getting on now, — she is nearing forty-five, — but she's still lovely; her smile makes me think of a pearl dropped in wine, and behind the melancholy of her eyes is that well of waiting irony. She looks as soft, as tenderly encompassing, as a summer night; but she is really sharp, sharp, sharp. Thwart or vex her, and out leaps the stiletto; or, rather, it would be more exact to say, out come the claws. But women of the Vera type will always, to young men like Captain Thornton, be angels pure and simple. I don't suppose, for one thing, that he'd ever talked intimately with any one quite like her. He came, I was to learn, from a remote country rectory where the great ladies of the neighbourhood had been unfashionable, matter of fact, and clothed for the most part in tweed and leather, and none of them would have been likely to make much, before the war, of a young soldier. Vera was making much of him, and a fashionable angel is an angel doubly equipped. He would not know what it was that made her so strange in her sweetness; but fashion of that achieved and recondite kind is like a soft incense wafted around a woman. She is first, everywhere, always, without an effort; and people who are first, if they also look like angels, win hearts as easily as they run and twist their fingers among their ropes of pearls, as Vera was doing now. She always wore her pearls; they fell together in a milky heap in her lap, and long earrings glimmered in the shadows of her hair.

Vera's way of talking, too, is like a spell. Her voice is rather like the fountain, so low, so inarticulate, yet so expressive. She murmurs rather than speaks, with now and then a pause that is almost a

soft gurgle. Sometimes it exasperates me to hear her, but sometimes even cross-grained I am charmed.

The voice purled and rippled and gurgled over Captain Thornton now. He sat on Vera's farther hand, and Mrs. Thornton sat between Vera and me. Already, at tea-time, Mrs. Thornton had interested me. She had remained silent without seeming shy. Superficially, no doubt, she was dowdy, and superficially she looked dull, or, as I saw it, dulled; and dull and dowdy is what at tea they all put her down for. It's curious, how in a group of highly civilized people, a newcomer, without a word or glance exchanged between them, is in a moment assessed and placed and relegated. Everybody was going to be very kind to Mrs. Thornton, that I saw, and everybody was going to relegate her; only the highly civilized can manage the combination.

Mrs. Thornton, from one point of view, had a pallid, podgy little face, with wide lips and short nose and a broad, infantile brow above eyes singularly far apart. All the same, and the more I looked at her the more I saw it, it was a delicious face; squared here, stubborn there, sweet by turns and glances. And she was of the loveliest colour, with a skin silver-white, and thick, shining, pale-gold hair, and eyes of a deep, dense, meditative blue. All her attributes, however, were invisible to Vera, and I was fully prepared for the glance with which, over Mrs. Thornton's imitation Panama, she presently said to me:

"Darling, do take Mrs. Thornton round the water-garden. It's so lovely at this hour. Captain Thornton must wait for it till to-morrow. He's too tired to go farther now."

Mrs. Thornton got up at once, with her air of vague acquiescence in anything proposed, and I led her up and out and down the lime-tree alley and through the copse, where Vera, in spring, has her wild garden, to the banks of the river, the clear, wandering little stream, bridged and islanded, golden in the afternoon light under its willows and reflecting irises and meadow-sweet.

"Now we can sit down," I said, and on a bench under a willow we did sit, Mrs. Thornton with an involuntary sigh of weariness. "I expect your husband will soon get all right here," I said presently. "It's such good air. Is his leg badly damaged?"

"Well, you see, he can already get about quite well with it," said Mrs. Thornton; "but I'm afraid he'll never be able to do any of the things he most cares for again — riding and cricket, and his soldiering, of course. He will have to give up the army. I am afraid it's afterwards one will begin to feel all the things that one must give up. Just now all that I can think about is that he has come back alive. Have you any one out there?" she asked.

I told her about Jack and how he had got a commission at the beginning of the war and gone out in January.

"It must be even more of a wrench to have them go when they are n't already in the army," said Mrs. Thornton. "A soldier's wife ought not to feel it so much of a wrench. I 'm afraid I did, though."

I saw already that Mrs. Thornton had taken to me. It was natural that she should. I had taken to her quite tremendously, and she must have felt it; and, besides, a great many women do feel confidence in me at once. I, to be sure, look like anything

but an angel, though I, like Vera, have small, pale features and dark hair. But mine's not a melancholy or mysterious face. My eyebrows dip together over my nose, and my mouth is at once placid and irascible. I look, in my straight, austere clothes, — the silver buckles on my shoes and the fob of old trinkets at my waist for all adornment, — like a cross between a young priest in his soutane and a Blue-Coat boy; and I think it is the boyish woman, curt and kind and impersonal, who gains the confidence of others of her sex.

"I don't know that it was more of a wrench," I said. "I expect that you and I felt pretty much the same sort of thing on that Victoria platform when we said good-bye to them. What do you and your husband intend doing, now that he has to give up his profession?"

"Well, we had thought of having a chicken-farm somewhere. We are both so fond of the country, and I've a cousin who has a chicken-farm, and I've helped her with it, and she has made it pay. Even if Clive's leg stays so bad, I am very strong. But we've had, really, no time yet to talk things over."

"You don't look very strong," I observed, "but that may be because you are over-tired. You look very tired. I should say that you got up at six this morning, and raced around London shopping in the heat, and packed, and had no lunch, and a journey on top of it all. So no wonder you are tired."

"How clever of you!" Mrs. Thornton cried, laughing. "That is exactly what I have been doing. And I've been in a Belgian refugee hostel ever since Clive went, and that is tiring, though it keeps one going, too. Don't you find it difficult

just to go on from day to day?" She was leaning forward on her knee now to look up into my face while I knitted. "I mean, when one wakes in the morning, for instance, to think that one has to get up and brush one's teeth and do one's hair and all the rest of it. It seems impossible when what one is feeling is that one wants to be chloroformed till it is all over. It was then that the hostel was so sustaining; one had to get up whether one felt like it or not."

"I know; yes," I said, nodding. "I've work, too, though it's not so sustaining as a hostel. I'm my cousin's secretary, and we have all these Tommies now; they take up a good deal of time. It must be curious, having it all over, all that weight of anxiety."

"It is, it is," said little Mrs. Thornton, eagerly, with her look of gratitude for finding some one with whom to talk about it. "It's almost like losing a limb. I feel crippled, as well as Clive. Is n't it absurd? But it's almost like loss. And one is dazed with the relief of it."

"How long have you been married?" I asked.

"Only a year and a half," she told me, and that Clive's mother and hers had been great friends, and that she had often gone to stay with his people in the country, so that she had always known him. Her mother had died when she was a child and her father only two years ago. She had lived in London with her father, who had been an artist. She was just twenty. And after she had told me about herself, she asked me about Jack, and I found myself telling her all about him and about those plans of ours for living together in London if he ever comes back.

The party at Compton Dally was small, and they were all there (except Sir Francis who was an old family friend and who was paying a long visit), to help Vera with her Tommies. The only other officer besides Captain Thornton was poor Colonel Appleby, a pale, frightened, middle-aged man invalided home with nervous shock. At dinner that night Lady Dighton, who is the embodiment of lassitude and acquiescence, had him, and Mrs. Travers-Cray had Sir Francis, and Vera had Captain Thornton, so that Percival fell to the share of Mollie Thornton, and I wondered how she liked him. If she was already feeling herself out of it, to have Percival at dinner would n't make her feel herself in; quite the reverse. Percival's appearance is always summed up to me by the back of his head: the wedge of fat, red neck above his high collar, the sleek, glittering black hair, and the rims of his red ears curving forward on each side. The back of his head seems really as characteristic as the front, though that is jovial and not unkindly. Percival looks sly over his food, and looks over his wine like the sort of man who is going to tell a story that no one else will find at all amusing. He told Mollie several such stories that night, I inferred, though she was evidently neither shy nor shocked; it was in the quality of her smile that I read her kindly endurance.

Milly, Vera's girl, just seventeen and just promoted to late dinner, sat on Mollie's other hand and did not, as far as I observed, address her once during the meal. But, then, Milly never makes efforts unless they are plainly useful. All Vera's beauty had been spoiled in her by the Dixon admixture, and yet she is a most engaging-looking

little minx, with broad, bold, black, idle eyes and a blunted nose, auburn hair and a skin of roses and carnations. Vera had seen to that. Poor Vera is quite fond of the child, a half-vexed, half-ironic constantly rebuffed tenderness. But Milly says to me, "Mother is such a bore, you know," and likes me far better, who make no claim upon her and who, she must feel, like her very little. She will soon take flight, however, when a sufficiently advantageous occasion presents itself. The war has been a sad blow to her projects, and what I like in Milly is the fact that she has never uttered a word of complaint as to the shattering of her girlish gaieties. However, to get back to Mollie Thornton, I don't think she could have enjoyed her companions at dinner.

After dinner I go and amuse the Tommies and talk to the nurses until bedtime, but, before I went, I observed that Vera, after her wont with the detrimental belongings of a guest, had placed Mollie in a corner with a book and the urgent, smiling murmur: "By a friend of mine. Quite, quite beautiful. I know you'll love it." It is a book called "Spiritual Control," with a portrait of its author, who is a stock-broker, a sleek, stalwart, satisfied person whom Vera characterizes, why I can't think, except that she had him once to stay after hearing his lecture, as her "friend." A great many people find the book inspiring; Vera, as a matter of fact, does n't, and she found Mr. Cuthbert Dawson a terrible bore. It was plain from her giving poor Mrs. Thornton "Spiritual Control" to read, where she placed her.

When I came back an hour later she was still in her corner with "Spiritual Control," but she wasn't

reading it. She had drawn the curtain at the window where she sat, and was looking out at the splendid, dramatic moonlight. Sir Francis and Colonel Appleby were reading the evening papers, Lady Dighton and Leila Travers-Cray talked together while they knitted, Milly had disappeared, and at the farthest end of the great room, on its farthest sofa, Vera, pale and pearly, was talking to Captain Thornton.

"Well," I said, "how is your spirit? Is it more controlled?"

Mrs. Thornton looked up at me, and after a moment her smile of understanding merged into one of friendly enjoyment.

"How do you manage," she said, "to be so austere in the daytime and so splendid at night? You make me think of a Venetian princess in that brocade."

"It is nice, is n't it?" I said. "And made by the littlest of dressmakers. I'm clever at clothes. But tell me how you like Mr. Cuthbert Dawson."

"Well, he is very cheerful and sincere," said Mrs. Thornton, kindly; "but I don't seem to get much out of it. I'm really too tired and stupid to read to-night."

"And it's time your husband was in bed," I said. "One of the nurses is coming for him."

Mrs. Thornton looked down the long room at her husband.

"If only I'd had the Red Cross training," she said, "I could have taken care of his leg then. I suppose I must n't ask to be allowed to. Is n't it quite early?" she added. "He's enjoying the talk with Lady Vera."

"It's half-past ten, and we are strict with our

invalids. Here is nurse now. I'll come up with you and see that you are comfortable."

No one could have said that there was any creature comfort lacking in Mrs. Thornton's reception at Compton Dally. Captain Thornton, as the invalid, had a larger room, but Mrs. Thornton's room, next it, was quite as charming a one, pink and grey, with old French prints and hangings of *toile de Jouy*. She went up to the prints for a moment of silent appreciation before turning to me with a sigh, half pleasure and half wistfulness.

"How lovely everything is here! Papa would have been in rapture over those Cochins. I shall enjoy my sleep to-night." And then, — it was her only sign of awareness, — "I suppose I'm to be allowed to go and say good-night to Clive when nurse has done with him."

My study at Compton Dally, where I type and write and do accounts, opens on the west terrace, and from my bureau I seemed, at most hours of the days that followed, to have a view of Mollie Thornton's little figure wandering, as it were, on the outskirts, not plaintive, — there was never a touch of plaintiveness, — but passive. With her sewing or knitting or a book she sat a good deal under the shade of the cedar that stands at the corner of the terrace, and she spent a good deal of time drifting up and down the vistas of the lawns and park watching birds, a binocular in her hand. She was certainly a most comfortable person to relegate, since she never looked melancholy and usually contrived to seem occupied, and Vera, when she passed behind her on the terrace on her

way to the dream-garden, Captain Thornton beside her, would pause and put her hand on her shoulder and say, "Happy, dear?" in the most dulcet tone. And when Mrs. Thornton, lifting those meditative eyes, answered, "Yes, thank you," Vera, all bland benevolence, would say, "That's right," and pass on. Leila Travers-Cray and Lady Dighton sometimes exchanged a few friendly remarks with her, and she read the morning papers to Colonel Appleby when his eyes hurt him; but she was relegated far, far away, as completely as any human being could be who could in any way count as a guest.

I was very busy and had not much time to be with her, though all the time I had was hers; but I knew accurately what she was feeling. I related it always with that dreadful Victoria platform, with those moments of pain and yet of rapture which we had both known, when we had felt ourselves, in our suffering, stand for England, lifted up in accepting sacrifice to the august and beautiful spirit that claimed our dearest. One would expect, after that transcendent suffering, to find as transcending a joy; but how was joy possible to a young wife caught into what might be to her husband a fairyland or a paradise, but to her was a cruel and complicated machine where her only part was to turn round with the other wheels and pretend to like it? I knew that it must not be taken too seriously. It was only to last for six weeks, and then she would have her Clive back again; yet while it lasted it must make the months of suffering passed through seem happy by comparison. There had then been nothing between them but distance and the fear of death; and now every-

thing was between them — everything Vera stood for; her house, her friends, her smile, her pearls, her dream-garden.

On morning after morning I saw Vera leading him away to it, with her armful of books, and Chang, her Pekinese, trotting at her heels. I perfectly understood Vera's state of mind in regard to Captain Thornton. There was no occasion for commonplace jealousy. He merely made her feel cheerful and rejuvenated. Everything she had to show and tell him was new to him. She became new to herself, poor old Vera! and gained from the quiet regard of his sane and simple eyes — handsome eyes under straight, dark brows — a sense of freshness and worth in everything. She liked him better than any of the wounded heroes she had yet had. Some of them had been merely stupid, and one or two had been gloomy, sardonic men — men of her own world, to whom nothing she had to say would seem new. Clive Thornton was neither stupid nor sardonic, and he was simple enough to accept Vera's fancy tricks — her talk of dreaming dreams and solitude — as part of an angel's manner, and he was just clever enough to be able to appreciate anything she had to say. I could quite see how endearing Vera must find his steady gaze and his considering silences. Even with my vigorous espousal of his wife's side I never felt angry with him. His not seeing that she was unhappy was part of the same innocence that made him not see that Vera was a cat. Mollie, besides, took quite as much care to conceal her unhappiness as Vera to behave like an angel. It never crossed his mind that his wife was relegated; it never crossed his mind that they were separated. He did not

feel separated; they were both, as far as he knew, in fairyland together. And yet I knew it might not all be so trivial and transient as it seemed. A new standard was being formed for him; a new idea of what it was to be an angel. It was possible that all unconsciously he would no longer think of Mollie as one when he left Compton Dally; and when I took this in I began to gather up my weapons.

I found Mollie one afternoon sitting on the bench under the willow-tree where we had had our first talk. She had her knitting, but her hands were still, and she was gazing before her at the water. If she were not a tragic figure, it was only because there are some things sadder than tragedy. She had faced everything, been through everything, she had gone down into the Hades where so many of us were still living, and now she found herself baulked and menaced by commonplace daylight. Tragedy is, in some ways, an easy thing to bear.

"Well, what are you doing here by yourself?" I asked her, advancing. There was a look on her face, startled and steadied, that showed me what she had been thinking about in the fancied security of her solitude. But she managed at once the vague smile that concealed so much, and said that she had been, as usual, resting. "I seem to find out every day more and more how tired I was," she added.

"You did n't care to go with the others, motoring?" I took my place beside her. "You'd have liked Marjorams. It's a lovely old place. Some people think it beats Compton Dally, though, naturally, I'm not one of them."

"I'm sure you're not," said Mollie, laughing a

little. "That was one of the things that first struck me about you — how you loved it. I felt that you were a fiercely loyal person."

"I think I am — narrow loyalties, but fierce ones," I said. "But you have n't answered my question."

"About motoring? I don't care much about it, you know. And there really was n't room enough for me."

I knew there had n't been; but I was deliberately eschewing tact.

"Has Captain Thornton gone?" I inquired, knowing, also, that he had n't.

"No; Lady Vera is reading to him in the flagged garden," said Mollie in the voice that showed me how little she had to learn about spiritual control. "Lady Vera is going to take him out for a run in her two-seater before dinner. He enjoys that a great deal more than the big car."

"It's far pleasanter, certainly," I agreed. And I went on: "They are reading, you mean, in the dream-garden. You must n't forget that it's a dream-garden — where one goes to be alone."

She looked round at me quickly, and after a moment I saw that she faintly coloured. She said nothing, leaving it to me to follow up my graceless gibe. I was quite ready to follow it up.

"As a matter of fact," I said, knitting the loops along the side of my heel, "Vera hardly ever *is* alone there. It's always, with Vera, a *solitude à deux*. She's not at all the sort of woman for real solitude. She is the sort of woman who likes to feel, or, rather, to look lonely and not to be alone."

To this, after a pause, Mollie said:

"She is very charming; Clive finds her very

charming." And, forced to it, apparently, by my crudity, she added, "Are n't you fond of her, then?"

"No, I'm not; not particularly," I said. "Especially not just now. Vera is not at her best, to my mind, when she is being angelic to young married men."

Mollie Thornton now blushed deeply.

"I am perfectly contented that she should be angelic to Clive," she said.

"You are very loyal," I returned. "But you'll own that he is getting more out of it than you are. It's a place, Compton Dally, for wounded heroes rather than for a wounded hero's wife."

"Do you mean," she asked after a moment, "that I ought n't to have come?" She had indeed owned to everything in the bewilderment of the question. I laughed at it.

"Ought n't to have been with your husband at a time like this! Even Vera could hardly ask that, could she? And that's my quarrel with her; that it's the time of all times that you should be together and that she never lets you see him, practically."

She looked away, and after a moment I saw that her eyes had filled with tears.

"He has n't an idea of it," she said at last.

"That fact does n't make you happier, does it?"

"He thinks I'm as happy as he is. He thinks that we are together in it all, and that she is an angel to me, too," said Mollie. "She always is an angel to me when she sees me."

"All men are rather stupid when it comes to knowing whether their wives are happy," I remarked. "I think your Clive is a great dear; but

I like you best because you see things he does n't. You, for instance, see that Vera is n't an angel, though she may look like one."

"He has no reason to think anything else, has he?" said Mollie, and I saw that I had brought her to the point to which I had intended to bring her. "I don't let him guess that I'm not happy; it would be horrid of me if I did, for it would only mean that he'd feel at once that we must go away, and all this loveliness would be over for him. A stuffy little flat in Bayswater is n't a very alluring alternative; and that's where we'd have to go — to my aunt's — till Clive was better."

"How you'd love the stuffy flat! How glad you'd be to be there with him! And, to do him justice, how happy he'd be there with you! He will be in a month's time. The only question is, the month. No, Vera is n't an angel. If she were an angel, she'd have seen to it that you were happy here, too. But when it comes to being nice to other women, — really nice, I mean, — she can be a cat. And what I'd like very much to see now is what she'd make of it if you could show her that you could look like an angel, too. It's so much a matter of looks."

"Make of it? But I could n't look like an angel."

"You could look like a rival; that's another way of doing it. You could look like another woman of her own sort. You could make her see you. She simply does n't see you now. I suspect that if Vera saw you and saw that you were charming, she'd show her claws. I'd like Captain Thornton to see her showing her claws."

In silent astonishment, her blue eyes fixed upon me, Mollie gazed.

"No, I don't hate Vera, if that's what you're wondering," I said. "I like you, that's all, and I don't intend that she shall go on making you unhappy."

"But I don't want Clive made unhappy," Mollie said. "I can't imagine what you mean; but, whatever it is, I don't want it. I could n't bear all this to be spoiled for him. I could n't bear it not to be always, for him, a paradise."

It was my turn to gaze at her, and I gazed penetratingly.

"And what if it all came to mean that you yourself, because of it, were never to be more to him than a second-rate paradise? What if she were to spoil you for him?"

I brought out the cruel questions deliberately, and for a moment Mollie faced them and me.

"Why do you say that? How cruel to say that!" she murmured, and then suddenly she bowed her head upon her hands. "It's been my terror. I'm ashamed of myself for thinking it. And now — you see it!"

I put my arm around her shoulders.

"I'm not cruel. I only want us to see things together. I don't really think they'd ever come to that; and, at all events, he would never know that they had."

"But I should," Mollie said.

"Yes, you would. And it's horribly true that real things can be spoiled and blighted by false things. I've often seen it happen. You do see the danger, and you must take up the burden, my dear, of being cleverer than your husband, and save him along with yourself. If Vera were what she looks and seems to him, he might be right in

feeling that he found in her something he could n't find in you. You must show him that she is n't what she looks and seems and you must show him that you can be a first-rate paradise, too."

"In a little flat in Bayswater! On a chicken-farm! No, it can't be done. Paradises of this sort don't grow in such places," poor Mollie moaned.

"You can keep up the real paradise in them — the one he has already — when you get there. The point is that you must show him now that you can look like this one here. And the way to look it is to dress it. I'm sure you've realized the absolutely supreme importance of dress for women of the paradise type — the women you see here, all these sweet ministering angels to the Tommies and the young husbands. I don't mean to say that, with the exception of Vera, they're not as nice as you are in spite of being well dressed; but I do mean that if they dressed as you do they'd not be women of the paradise."

Mollie's hands had fallen, and she was gazing again with eyes childlike, astonished, and trusting.

"But, Judith, what do you mean?" she asked. "Dress? Of course you all dress beautifully. Have n't I loved simply looking at you all, as if you'd been the most exquisite birds? But how could I do it? I have n't the money; I never have had. If one has no money, one must be either æsthetic or dowdy, and I've always prefered to be dowdy."

"Yes, I saw that; I liked you for that. There's hope for the dowdy, but none for the æsthetic; the one is humble, and the other is complacent. Your clothes express renunciation simply — and the summer sales. But though it is a question of

money, some women who have masses of money never learn how to dress. They remain mere dressmakers' formulas; and others, with very little, can't be passed by. They count anywhere. You've noticed my clothes. I've hardly any money, yet I'm perfect. All my clothes mean just what I intend them to; just as Vera's mean what she intends, and Mrs. Travers-Cray's and Lady Dighton's, and Milly's, for Milly already is as clever as possible at knowing her thing. But you've abandoned the attempt to intend. You've sunk down, and you let the winds rake over you. You've always made me think of a larkspur, that blue and silver kind, all pensive grace and delicacy; but you're a larkspur that has n't been staked. Your sprays don't count; they tumble anyhow, and no one sees your shape or colour. Last night, for instance — that turquoise-blue chiffon: not turquoise, and not that sort of chiffon."

"I know it. I hated it," she said.

"Of course you did, and so does any one who looks at you in it."

"But I could n't afford the better qualities," she appealed. "And in the cheaper ones I could n't get the blue I wanted, the soft Japanese blue."

"No, you could n't. And you thought it would n't show if you had it made up on sateen. It always does show. No, it needs thought and time and computing, too much time, too much thought, to say nothing of too much money for many women, of course; for them it would n't be worth it. There are other things to do than to live in paradise. But for you it is worth it; to show him that you can look like an angel, and to show him that Vera can look like a cat. No, *I'll* show

him; mine is the responsibility. It's worth it, at all events, to me. I'll put in the stakes, and tie you and loop you and display you. You'll see. I told you I'd a clever little dressmaker. That's an essential. And we'll scrape up the money. You shall be dressed for once as you intend."

She was bewildered, aghast, tempted, and, on the top of everything, intensely amused. Her face was lighted as I'd never seen it before with pure mirth, and it looked like still, silver water that becomes suddenly glimmering, quivering, eddying, and sunlit. She was charming thus lighted. It was a sort of illumination of which Vera's face is incapable; her gaiety is always clouded with irony.

"It is all too kind, too astonishing, too funny for words," Mollie said. "Of course I should love to be well dressed for once, and I can't see why I should n't avail myself of your little dressmaker now, — especially now, since, as you tell me, I offend through my dowdiness. And I do really need some new clothes. I'm wearing out my trousseau ones, you know. Yes; was n't it a horrid little trousseau? But, don't you see," and the sunlight faded, "I can't be a real, not a real angel, not a real paradise. It's much deeper. It's a question of roots. It's the way they smile, the way they walk, the way they know what they want to say and what they don't want to say."

I nodded. "You know, too, and you'd say it, if people saw you and cared to hear what you said."

"That would help, of course. I've never felt so stupid in my life as here. But, oh, it's deeper!" said Mollie. "I don't belong to it. How they all make me feel it! I'm an outsider; and why should I pretend not to be?"

"It would n't be pretending anything to dress as you'd like to dress. No one who *sees* is an outsider now a days, if they can contrive to make themselves seen. That's the whole point. And there's nothing you don't see. You see far more than Vera does. Don't bother about the roots. Take care of the flowers, and the roots will take care of themselves; that's another modern maxim for you. Your flowers are there, and all that we need think of now is how to show them. Wait. You'll see. We'll go to London to-morrow," I said; "and this very evening we'll have a talk about your hair."

You may be sure that I was on the spot to see a week or so later my larkspur's début as an angel. We were all assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, and she was a little late, as I, not she, had intended that she should be. It was precisely the moment for a mild sensation. The day had been hot and long. Everybody, apart from being anxious, — for everybody was anxious, Sir Francis and Mrs. Travers-Cray with sons at the front and Lady Dighton's husband in the Dardanelles — apart from that ever-present strain, everybody to-day was a little jaded, blank, and tired of one another. There reigned, as a symptom, that silence that in the moments before dinner falls sometimes upon people who know each other too well for surmise or ceremony. They stood about looking at the evening newspapers; they picked up a book; they sat side by side, knitting without speaking. Vera, sunken in a deep chair near my sofa, yawned wearily. No one, in fact, had anything to look to before bedtime except the stimulant of the consommé or a possible surprise in the way of sweets.

I had known that I could count upon Mollie not to be self-conscious when she appeared in her new array, but I had n't counted upon such complete and pensive simplicity. Her eyes were on me as she entered, her husband limping behind her, and they seemed to ask me, with a half-wistful amusement, if she came up to my expectations. She far surpassed them. I never saw a woman to whom it made more difference. "It," on this occasion, was blue — the blue of a night sky and the blue of a sky at dawn, the blue, too, of my larkspurs, lapping at the edges here and there, as delicately as filaments of cloud crossing the sky, into white. It made one think, soft, suave triumph that it was, of breezes over the sea at daybreak and of a crescent moon low on a horizon and of white shores and blue Grecian hills; at least it made me think of these things, it and Mollie together; and with it went the alteration of her hair — bands of folded gold swathed round and round her little head. No one but myself had ever seen before that Mollie had the poise and lightness of a Tanagra figure nor that the shape of her face was curious and her eyes strange and her skin like silver; but I knew, as she advanced down the long room, that Vera, sunken in her chair, saw it all at last, drank in every drop of it, with an astonishment that, though it expressed itself in no gesture, I was able to gauge from her very stillness, her concentration of stillness, as she watched the relegated becoming visible at last. It's not pleasant for anybody to have to own that they've been blind and made a mistake, and Vera was specially fond of discovering oddity and charm and of claiming and displaying and discussing a discovery. And here was oddity and charm which

she had not only failed to discover, but had helped to obscure. Mollie was indeed visible, and every eye was on her as she drifted quietly forward in the evening light and sat down beside me. She was mine, and no one else's; that was quite evident, too.

That Captain Thornton had received something of a revelation was also evident, though it had not probably amounted to more than seeing, and saying, that Mollie was looking awfully well; but it expressed itself in the fact that, instead of joining Vera, as was his wont, he came and sat down next to Mollie on my sofa. We began to talk, and, though the watching pause was prolonged for yet another moment, the others then began to talk, too. It was as if, not quite knowing what had happened to them, they were all a little cheered and exhilarated; as if they'd had their consommé and as if the sweet had been altogether a surprise. A spectacle of any sort has this effect upon a group of jaded people. Only Vera kept her ominous silence.

Dinner was announced, and we all got up. Percival, with a new alacrity, approached Mollie, — he almost always had Mollie, — the others paired off as usual, and Vera rose to Captain Thornton's arm. It was then that she said, smiling thoughtfully upon Mollie:

"Are n't you doing your hair in a new way, dear?"

I saw from Mollie's answering smile that she was still ingenuous enough to hope that she might win Vera's approval with that of the others, the hope, too, that while Clive might think of herself as a first-rate angel, he should never see Vera as a cat.

"It is new," she said. "I've just learned how to; Judith showed me. Do you like it?"

Leaning on Captain Thornton's arm, Vera, with gently lifted brows, rather sadly shook her head.

"I suppose I don't care about fashions. It's very fashionable, is n't it? But I loved so that great, girlish knot. People's way of doing their hair is part of their personality to me. Judith cares so much about fashion, I know. Do you care about fashion, Captain Thornton? Do you like this fashionable way? You know, I can't help always thinking that it makes women's heads look like cheeses; in napkins, you know — Stiltons."

It was the first scratch. Mollie, though with a little startled glance, took it with all mildness, making no comment as Percival led her away, Percival remarking that it was, he thought, a ripping way of doing her hair; and I, as I went out manless, heard Captain Thornton, behind me, saying, in answer to Vera's murmurs:

"Yes; I see; I see what you mean. But, do you know, all the same I think it's most awfully becoming to Mollie. It brings out the shape of her face so."

"What a *dear* little face it is!" said Vera, rapidly leaving the cheese.

It all worked like a stealing spell. There was nothing marked or sudden in it. No one, I think, except Vera, was aware that his or her attitude to little Mrs. Thornton had changed. She had become visible, that was all, and they became aware that she was not only worth looking at, but worth talking to. At dinner that night old Sir Francis fixed his eye-glass to observe her more than once and after dinner he joined her in the drawing-room

and talked with her till bedtime. It turned out then that he had known her father and actually possessed one of his pictures; had been a great admirer. Next morning he was walking with her on the terrace before breakfast. Mollie in a blue lawn, as sprightly as it was demure, her casque of golden hair shining in the sunlight. Lady Dighton asked her that afternoon to come motoring with her and the Tommies, and in the evening I heard Mrs. Travers-Cray, while she and Mollie wound wool together, telling her about her two boys at the front. The only person who did n't see more of Mollie was Captain Thornton; but that, I felt sure, was because Vera was determined that he should n't.

It was not for a day or two that I was able to compare notes with Mollie.

"Well," I said, joining her on the terrace before dinner, "*ça y est.*"

"It's extraordinary," said Mollie. "Everything is different. I myself am different. I feel, for one thing, as if I'd become clever to match my clothes. It would be almost humiliating to have the mere clothes make so much difference and every one change so to me unless I could really feel that I'd changed, too."

"You're staked. I told you how it would be."

"And I owe it all to you. It's a wonderfully sustaining feeling to be staked; secure, peaceful. Such a funny change, Judith, is little Milly! Have you noticed? She came up to me when I was walking this afternoon and linked her arm in mine, and in ten minutes was confiding in me all about her perplexed love-affairs, as if we'd been old friends."

"Yes, she would. She loves to tell people about her love-affairs."

"But I could n't have imagined that she was really so ingenuous; for, in a sense, she is ingenuous."

"Exceedingly ingenuous when she is n't exceedingly sophisticated; I think one often sees the mixture. The only thing you must be prepared for with the Milly type is that in a week's time she may forget that she ever confided in you and, almost, that she ever knew you. Her ingenuousness is a form of presumptuousness."

"Yes, I think I saw that. I'm beginning to see so many things — far more things than I'll ever have use for on a chicken-farm, Judith." And Mollie laughed a little.

"And what does your husband say?" I asked.

"Well, I've not seen much of him, you know. But I'm sure he likes it awfully, the way I look."

"Only Vera won't let him get at you to tell you so."

"Oh, he sees enough of me to tell me so," said Mollie, smiling: "only it takes him time to come to the point of saying things, and it's true that we have n't much time."

"And she has n't given you any more scratches before him?"

"Not before him." Mollie flushed a little. "It *was* a scratch, was n't it? I don't think he saw that it was."

"He will see in time. And it's worth it, is n't it, since it's to make him see?"

"Yes, I can bear it. She's rather rude to me now when he is n't there, you know; but it's really less blighting to have some one see you enough to be rude to you than to see you so little that they are affectionate. Yet I hope she won't be too rude."

"She can hardly bear it," I said.

It was the next morning that Vera showed me how little she was able to bear it. She had kept me singularly busy, as if afraid that I might wave a magic wand even more transformingly, and she came into the study where I was writing invitations for a garden-fête in aid of the Red Cross fund, and after giving me very dulcetly a long list of instructions, she went to the window and looked out for some silent moments at Mollie sauntering up and down with Sir Francis under the blue bubble of her parasol.

"I suppose you dressed her when you took her up to town that day," she then remarked.

I had wondered how long Vera could keep under cover and I was pleased to see her emerge.

"Well, hardly that," I said, marking off with my pen the names of the people on my list who were away and not to be counted on for help with the bazaar. "She badly needed some clothes and could n't afford expensive places; so I took her to my little woman. She was able to carry out Mollie's ideas perfectly. She has charming ideas, has n't she? She knows so exactly what suits her."

"Carry out her ideas? She has n't an idea in her head. Carry out yours, you mean, you funny creature. I can't conceive why you took the pains to dress up the deadly little dowd." Vera drummed with her fingers on the window-pane. Mrs. Travers-Cray had joined Mollie and Sir Francis, and they sat down in a shady corner of the terrace. Mrs. Travers-Cray, sweet, impassive, honey-coloured woman, was one of the few people for whose opinions and tastes Vera had a real regard.

"Oh, you 're mistaken there, Vera, just as you've been mistaken about her looks," I said, all dis-

passionate limpidity. "She has heaps of ideas, I can assure you, and I saw it from the beginning; just as I saw that she was enchanting looking."

"Enchanting! Help! Help! That little skim-milk face, with those great calf's eyes! Who is the poor dear martyr thing who carries her eyes on a plate? St. Lucia, is n't it? She makes me think of that — as much expression. You may have succeeded in making her less of a dowd, but you'll never succeed in making her less of a bore."

"Well, Mrs. Travers-Cray does n't find her a bore," I remarked, casting a glance of quiet, satisfied possessorship at the group outside.

"Oh, Leila always was an angel," said Vera, "and your little protégée has made a very determined set at her."

"Sir Francis is an angel, too, then. He delights in her; that's evident." It was perhaps rather indiscreet of me to goad Vera like this, but I could not resist taking it out of her and rubbing it into her, and I knew that Sir Francis would vex her almost as much as Mrs. Travers-Cray. "And look at Milly," I added. "You can't say that Milly is an angel. The fact is that Mrs. Thornton is a very charming young woman, and that if you don't see it you are the only person who does n't."

"Another person who does n't see it is her husband," said Vera. She was determined not to show that she was angry, but I could see how angry she was. "Sir Francis, of course, old goose, thinks any one charming if they are young and dress well and look at him with appealing eyes. It is her husband I'm really sorry for. It's evident that he never spoke to a civilized woman in his life till he came here. He does n't show much signs of finding his

wife interesting, does he? Poor fellow! It's pitiful the way men fall into these early marriages with the first curate's daughter they find round the corner. And now that she's pushing herself forward like this, he is done for." Vera, I saw, was very angry to be goaded so far.

"Surely she is the more interesting of the two," I blandly urged. "Neither of them has a spark of ambition if it comes to pushing; they'll be quite happy on their chicken-farm. But if it were a question of getting on and getting in with the right people, it would, I imagine, be she rather than he who would count. This last day or two has made that evident to my mind. In her soft, strange way little Mollie is unique, whereas he is only an honest young soldier, and there are thousands more just like him, thank goodness!"

Vera at this turned her head and looked at me for a moment. After all, even if I was n't angry, I, too, had given myself away. And it evidently pleased her to recognize this — to recognize that she was n't being worsted merely by Mollie's newly revealed charm, but by my diplomacy as well. And it is rather a good mark to Vera, I think, that I don't believe it ever crossed her mind for a moment that she had the simplest method of speedy vengeance in her hands — had simply to send me packing. Of course we should both have known that to use such a method would have been to reveal one's self as crude and vulgar; yet a cattish woman who is very angry may easily become both. Vera did n't. There are things I always like about her.

She took up now one of my lists, and while she scanned it said, smiling with cousinly good-humour:

"Ah, but you can hardly expect me to look upon you as a judge of that, Judith darling — how much a man counts, I mean, and how much he does n't. You are so essentially a woman's woman, are n't you? I suppose it's just because you are so crisp and clever and unromantic that men don't feel drawn to you, foolish creatures! So that you never get a chance, do you, of finding out anything about them except their way of brushing their hair and the colour of their ties. You're a first-rate woman's woman, I grant you, and you're very clever and you've succeeded in foisting your little friend on silly Sir Francis and on Leila Travers-Cray, and it's all rather dear and funny of you, and I've quite loved watching it all and seeing you at work; but you won't succeed in foisting Mrs. Thornton on her husband, and he'll hardly give you an opportunity of finding out whether he's anything more than an honest young soldier. I have found him," — and Vera now spoke with a simple candour, — "quite, quite a dear; with a great deal in him — sensitiveness, tact, flavour. So much could have been made of him! I, in my little way, could have taken him up and started him. But what can one do for a man who has a wife who does n't know how to dress without help and who will push herself forward? No; I'm afraid Mrs. Mollie, after she's left your hands, Judith dear, will tumble quite, quite flat again. *Would* you mind, darling, getting all the invitations off to-day? We must n't be slipshod about it. And don't forget to write to the merry-go-round man, and to Mark Hammond to see if he'll sing." So, having delivered what she hoped might be a somewhat stinging shaft at my complacency, Vera trailed away.

If I had n't so goaded her I don't believe, really, that she'd have taken the trouble that she did take to prove herself right and me wrong. There had been, before this, little conscious malice or intended unkindness. But now the claws were out. During the next day or two it at once justified and infuriated me to watch the manifold little slights and snubs of which poor Mollie was the victim, the dexterity with which, while seeming all sweetness, Vera essayed to belittle and discompose her, to display her as ignorant or awkward or second-rate. Only a woman can be aware of what another woman is accomplishing on these lines, and though Captain Thornton once or twice showed a puzzled brow, her skill equalled her malice, and he never really saw. I was prepared for it when Mollie came to my study one morning and shut the door and said:

"I'm afraid I can't stand it any longer, Judith."

"It has been pretty bad," I said. "She's been so infernally clever, too."

"Our time is really nearly up," said Mollie, "and I'm trying to think of some excuse for getting Clive to feel we'd better go before it comes. Only now she's telling him that I am jealous of her."

Pen in hand, I leaned back and looked up at my poor little accomplice. This, I recognized, was indeed Vera's trump-card, but I certainly had n't foreseen that she would use it.

"Has he told you so?" I asked.

"Oh, no, he would n't. He could n't, could he? But I know it. Men are very transparent, are n't they, Judith? He is always urging me to see more of her, and telling me that she is so kind, so clever, such a dear, and that I'd really think so, too, if I'd

try to see more of her. And when I say that I'm sure she is, and that I hope I shall see more of her, he thinks — I can see it — that I'm only playing up, and between us, her and me, he is rather wretched and uncomfortable. What shall I do, Judith? You saw the way at tea yesterday, when she was talking about pictures, she was really sneering at father's, and when I tried to answer, — because I felt I had to answer about that, — making me seem so rude and sullen. Clive knows nothing about pictures; so he did n't understand. And it's all the time like that. I have to pretend not to see and be bland and silent; or, if I try to answer, she turns everything against me."

"Be patient. Give her a little more time," I said. "She'll run to earth if you give her a little more time."

"But it is so horrid, between Clive and me, Judith: if I say what I think to him, he will only see it as jealousy, so even with him I have to pretend, and it makes me feel as if I were growing to be like her, and I can't bear it."

I meditated while poor Mollie dried her eyes, to which the irrepressible tears had risen. "Ask him if he can't arrange for you to see more of her," I said presently.

She looked at me with a general trust, yet a particular scepticism.

"But she will make that seem as if I were trying to force myself on them; because she's always with him, is n't she?"

"Only now because she keeps him, not because he wants to stay. I'm quite sure that he wants to be more with you. I think you can manage it, Mollie. Just say, when he next urges: 'Oh, but I'd

love to, Clive. Only you must tell me when. Perhaps sometime you'd take me to the dream-garden when you think she'll be there and that she'd care to have me, and then, when you get us started, you could leave us. You could go and take Judith for a stroll.' Something of that sort."

She eyed me sadly and doubtfully.

"I'll try whatever you tell me to try, but I feel afraid of her. I feel as if she cared, really cared, to do me harm."

"She's been proved wrong," I said, "and I've rather rubbed it in; but at the worst, Mollie, she can never harm you now as there was danger of her doing. It's better, far better, you'll own, for your husband to think you're jealous and a naughty angel than for him to think you're a second-rate one." With this aphorism, for the time being, she had to be contented. I myself felt sure that the hour of reckoning was to come.

It was next afternoon, after lunch, Vera being engaged in the drawing-room with visitors, that I met Captain Thornton on the lawn with his wife. Mollie was very large-eyed and rather pale, and I inferred from her demeanour that she had taken a step or made a move of some kind.

"Do come with us, Miss Elliot," said Captain Thornton. "I'm just taking Mollie along to the dream-garden. She wants to have a little talk, all to herself, with Lady Vera, and Lady Vera told me to wait for her there till these people were gone; so it's just the thing. And you and I can leave them together, do you see? People never get really to know each other unless they are alone together, do they?"

"No, they don't," I replied. "Though sometimes

they never get to know each other when they *are* alone together," I could n't resist adding; but as I saw a slight bewilderment on his honest face I indulged in no further subtleties, and made haste to add, "Does Vera know that you were going to arrange a meeting?"

"Oh, not a bit of it. That's just the point," said the guileless young man. "I want her to think that it's all Mollie's doing, you know; because she's got it into her head that Mollie does n't really care about her. Funny idea, is n't it? As if Mollie could be like that to any one who's been as kind to us as Lady Vera has! But I'm sure that if they have a few quiet talks it will all come right. Mollie is so undemonstrative; I told her that. It needs time for her to get used to anybody."

Mollie, her arm within her husband's, cast across his unconscious breast a grave, deep glance upon me as he thus quoted his defence of her. What was she to do with Vera, the glance perhaps asked me, too, now that she was to have her? What account of the interview would Vera serve up to Clive? Was not her last state to be worse than her first? I tried, in my answering glance, to reassure and sustain, yet I myself felt uncertainty about this fulfilment of my counsel.

We reached the dream-garden. Vera and Captain Thornton had been there for most of the morning, and books and papers were piled on the seat where the grey and purple cushions denoted attitudes of confident tête-à-tête.

Captain Thornton and I talked about the war, and I saw, with a mild, reminiscent irony, remembering Vera's sting, that he was perfectly prepared to give me every opportunity for judging him. I

felt, indeed, though Vera had so absorbed him, that he had never cared to talk about the war with her. She and the other angels were there to help one to forget, but with me he was glad to remember. It was I who heard Vera's swift footfall approaching. Captain Thornton, stooping to mark out with books and pencils the plan of a battle, had, I think, almost forgotten the coming interview, and until Vera appeared among the cypresses, flushed above her pearls, he remained unaware. She stood there at the top of the steps for a moment, looking down at us, at Captain Thornton and me, our heads so close together, and at Mollie in her blue and with her unrevealing little face, and I saw from her expression, as she took us all in, that she had not been succeeding so well with Captain Thornton as Mollie and even I had feared. It was a smouldering irritation against him that flared up with her anger against Mollie and me.

"Oh!" she said, a dreadfully significant monosyllable on Vera's competent lips. It expressed surprise and weariness and the slight embarrassment of the civilized confronted with the barbarian. "Oh!" she repeated, and she descended the steps, Chang trotting after her with his countenance of quizzical superciliousness. "I'm so very, very sorry." She did not look at any of us now; her voice was exceedingly inarticulate and exceedingly sweet. "I'm afraid there's been a mistake. It's the other gardens that are for my friends. I'm charmed always to see them there. And there are so many other gardens, are n't there? But this is my own dream-garden, my very own; for solitude, where I come to be alone. One must be alone sometimes. I get very tired."

We had, of course, all risen, Clive staring, while, still with those weary, averted eyes, Vera softly beat the desecrated cushions and shook them into place.

"It's my fault," Clive stammered. "I mean — I did n't understand. I thought you and Mollie could have a talk here. She wanted to get to know you better, and I suggested this."

Vera had sunk down in her corner, patting her silken knee, so that Chang sprang up upon it and settled down among the pearls. "I'm very, very sorry," she gurgled, with oh, such vagueness! "It's my one corner. My one place to be alone. I don't see people here unless I've asked them to come." She took up a review and opened it, and her eyes scanned its pages.

We were dismissed, — "thrown out," as the Americans say, — and we retreated up the steps, Mollie helping Clive, and down the flagged path and out into the lime-tree alley.

It was a display so complete that it left me, indeed, a little abashed by the success of my manœuvres, while at the same time I felt that I must n't let Captain Thornton discern the irrepressible smile that quivered at the corners of my mouth. When we were out on the lawn he turned his startled eyes on me.

"Really, you know, I'd no idea, Miss Elliot — what?" He appealed to me.

"That Vera could lose her temper?" I asked.

Clive continued to stare.

"It comes to that, does n't it? What else can it mean?" He looked now at his wife. "To speak like that to you, Mollie! And when she's been saying she wanted so awfully to make real friends with you."

Mollie, I saw, was dismayed. The triumph had been too complete. She could not keep up with it.

"I am sure that Lady Vera is very badly overwrought about something," she said. "She wanted particularly to be alone and she found us there, and it put her on edge." Actually she was trying to patch up his fallen angel for him.

"But she told me to wait there for her. — Sent me off to wait for her when those people came," said Clive. "It seems to me that it was you she minded finding. And yet she's been going on about your never coming to talk to her. She's been going on about it like anything." He caught himself up, blushing, and I saw that Vera was all revealed to him. I hardly needed to pluck another pinion from her, though I did n't resist the temptation to do so, saying:

"You see, Vera is rather jealous. She can't bear sharing things — her friends of her dream-garden. She liked to have you there, but she did n't like to have Mollie there. Did she tell you she wanted to make friends with Mollie? She's never taken any pains to show it, has she?"

"Oh, please, Judith!" Mollie implored.

"But he sees it all now, Mollie, so why should n't I say it?" I inquired. "Her point has been, Captain Thornton, to keep you in and to keep Mollie out, and she very nearly succeeded in doing it."

"Please, Judith! It's not only that. She's been such a real friend to you, Clive! I'm sure she is overwrought about something, and it will be all right when you next meet her." But Mollie pleaded in vain.

"I'm hanged if it will be all right!" said Captain Thornton.

Vera made no attempt to reinstate herself. It was part of her strength never to try to recover what was lost. She kept up appearances, it is true, but that was for her own sake rather than in any hope, or even wish, to regain his good opinion. When we all met at tea, she came trailing in, with Chang under her arm, and as she sank into her place, diffusing the suavest unconsciousness, she said to Mrs. Travers-Cray:

"Charlie Carlton's been killed, have you heard? This war is something more than I can bear."

Charlie Carlton, as I knew, was a cousin of the recent callers and a most remote friend of Vera's; but it was the best that she could do for the occasion, and all that she was inclined to do, though a melancholy smile, as impersonal as it was impartial, was turned more than once on Captain Thornton and Mollie as she inquired whether they liked sugar in their tea or had enough cream. She had made their tea for six weeks now, and after the first week she had never forgotten that they both liked sugar and both disliked cream. But she thus washed her hands of intimacy while keeping up the graces of hostess-ship. They might have arrived that afternoon.

Mollie and her husband rose beautifully to the situation, for their last two days at Compton Dally; that is, Mollie rose, for the husband at such times has only to follow and be silent. I don't think that she could have shown a grace and a distance as achieved as Vera's had it not been for those charming clothes of hers. You must have something to rise from if you are to float serenely above people's heads; otherwise you merely stand on tiptoe, very uncomfortably. Mollie and Vera might have been

two silken balloons, passing and repassing suavely in the dulcet summer air. And on the last day Vera's sense of dramatic fitness prompted her, evidently, to the most imperturbable *volte-face:* she showed to Mollie a marked tenderness. To Captain Thornton she was kind, perfectly kind, but that she found him rather dull was evident. It might have been Mollie with whom she had spent all those hours in the dream-garden.

"Must you really go, dear?" she asked.

Mollie said that she was afraid they must. She had heard from her aunt, who was waiting to take them in, and, owing to all Vera's kindness, Clive was now quite strong again. Vera did not insist.

"I've *so* loved getting to know you!" she said, holding Mollie's hand at the door of the motor on the morning of their departure. "It's been *such* a pleasure. You must often, often come to Compton Dally again. *Good*-bye, dear!"

But Mollie knew, and Vera knew that she knew, that never again would they be asked to Compton Dally. Meanwhile, if the war is n't over and Jack has n't come back, I'm to go and stay with them next spring on the chicken-farm.

EVENING PRIMROSES

IT had been a hot day and there seemed to be thunder in the air, but she was afraid there would be no rain that night. The abandoned garden needed it sadly; though, as she reflected, rain would encourage weeds rather than the few remaining flowers. Poppies had sown themselves everywhere, degenerates of the Shirleys which, three years ago, had spread their silken cups in the large bed at the foot of the lawn. Their withered stalks cracked beneath her steps in the paths and glimmered under the unpruned branches of the cordon apple trees. There were thistles, too, sorrel, and tall nettles, a matted carpet of bindweed and groundsel in the little kitchen-garden, once so neat, and, of course, as poor Charlie had predicted, the Michaelmas daisies had eaten up nearly everything in the herbaceous border. That was one of the last questions he had written to her: "How are my pink phloxes? Have the Michaelmas daisies smothered them?" They had. It was the season at which the phloxes should be in fullest flower, but not one was to be seen; the dense, fine foliage of the daisies had advanced in a wall of green nearly to the border's edge.

It was still oppressively warm. A toad hopped

indolently away and paused at the box edging, lying up against it, his front feet extended, as if so wearied by the heat that he took his chances of discovery. She stopped to look at the clumsy creature, in which so little of nature's accurate grace was expressed; and as she stood there, a sudden rustle in the box betrayed another inhabitant — this time a baby hedgehog which, too young for fear, moved busily about among the flat dandelion plants that rosetted the path, and even, encountering the tips of her shoes, stopped to examine them carefully before moving on again. The baby hedgehog would have amused Charlie. He had always been delightful about animals; he and the boys had always had that great interest in common.

Yes, the bird-boxes were still there. She could see one in the big apple tree and one fixed to the porch of the house, under the rose. How well she remembered the frantic delight that hailed the hatching of the first brood of tits. And the day when Charlie had deemed it prudent to withdraw the door for a peep at the beautifully fitted mosaic of bright little heads and bodies within, lifting up Giles in his holland pinafore for a long, blissful gaze. Six years ago that must have been.

The light was altering now, and when she turned at the end of the path, a great moon had risen across the lane and seemed to hang in the branches of the walnut tree that grew in the field beyond. A great, shining, heavy moon, and mournful, it seemed to her; her desolate thoughts, she was aware, lending their colour to everything. Heavy, mournful, desolate; that was the rhythm of her own steps passing along in the twilight, pursued by the

unformulated consciousness that lay behind all these pictures of the past; pausing at last, as if to let the dogging sorrow overtake her, as she came to where, near the summer-house, against the wall, the evening primroses grew.

It was years since Charlie had first planted them there, and she had said to herself at the time that they would never be rid of them, tenacious, recurrent things, sowing themselves patiently, and coming up loyally even when there was no one to wish them well. She felt touched by their presence; for though she had always found them untidy and uninteresting, she saw, really now for the first time, that they could be beautiful. Homely, loyal flowers; yet — was it the invading sense of sorrow colouring them, too? — a little uncanny, showing at this neutral hour of mingled dusk and moonlight their pale, evident gold; becoming conscious, as it were, becoming personal at the time when other flowers became invisible. Not that it was a sinister uncanniness; not that of ghosts; of fairies, rather; the very strangeness, sadness, sweetness of the moon, to which, from them, she lifted her eyes. And they reminded her of something, but what, she could not say. Not of Charlie. There had never been anything strange or sad about Charlie, except the fact, pursuing her now in his deserted garden, that he was dead and would never see it again.

It was a year to-day since he had been killed, and she had come down to the country with the sense of commemoration. She wanted, alone in the little place so full of thoughts of him, to find him, to recall him; and she had been doing that at every turn. Yet the evening primroses shining there

brought a pang deeper than any vision of him. They, though so homely, seemed to personify loneliness; they seemed to be missing something; and although she was desolate because Charlie was dead, because he would never again delight in his garden, it was, in a sense, for him rather than for herself that she sorrowed, and, in a sense, she did not miss him at all.

She stood still in the path, her hands clasped behind her, her head bent, a personification of widowhood in her thin black draperies, her intent, memorial poise. And she could have said of herself with truth that, during all this year, she had known only a widow's sad preoccupations. There had been the settling of business matters; lawyers and bankers to interview; planning for the boys, with schoolmasters to visit; and the tending of bereaved relations — Charlie's dear old parents clung to her. But now, on the day of his death, it was as if for the first time she had had leisure, at last, to realize that, with it all, she had never had the widow's heart. She had grieved over him; she had longed to do all for him that could be done — there was nothing new in that; but it was far worse than not being heartbroken: it was the sorry fact that she did not even miss him. He had left, as it were, no emptiness behind him.

She had lifted her head and looked round the garden, trying, in the physical fact of absence, to summon the spiritual void. How he had planned, dug, planted it; pruned his fruit trees; placed his anemones in leaf-mould, his bulbs on sand. She saw his kindly, handsome figure everywhere; his brown cheek, good grey eye, and close-cropped, tawny hair. A manly, simple creature; the salt of

the earth, as honest as the day — oh, she saw it all; she had said it to herself a hundred times; and there had, indeed, been nothing one could say against Charlie. But then, as a wife, there had been nothing to say against her, either; he had been perfectly happy with her — the happiest creature, even in the manner of his death. He had been killed instantaneously, while walking, on a sunny day, beside his men along a road in France. Every letter she had had from his brother officers over there spoke of his gaiety and good spirits. The war itself had, on the whole, meant happiness to him, for all his gravity over certain of its tragedies. But he had been almost as grave over mischances with his Boy Scouts, and it had all remained for him an immense, magnificent form of boy-scouting.

Dear, good Charlie! Yet — was it possible that something of the old long-conquered exasperation could still, at this hour, thrust itself into her memories? He had not been quite boyish enough to justify his lightness and make it loveable. That had been the final fundamental trouble in their mistaken marriage; she had not been able to mother him. He had not been appealing, beguiling, endearing, like a child. Not like a child; not boyish, fatherly, rather; even playfully didactic, and assuming always that theirs was a completely reciprocal marital intimacy. It had not been his fault, of course. She had been too clever ever to let him guess how stupid she found him. She felt the possessive arm laid about her shoulders for an evening stroll; saw the wag of his premonitory finger as he raised himself from a border to call out a jocose reprimand; heard the chaff with which, before friends, he counted her mistaken opinions.

And it had been when they were alone, especially at dinner, — Charlie across the table from her in his faultless black and white, — that the pressure of their distance had been most difficult to protect him from. He talked then, and she had to answer adequately. He was fond of talk, and, while the most uncritical of Conservatives, was full of solutions for old ills. He took Trade-Unionists, Home-Rulers, and Dissenters playfully and held them up to kindly ridicule. "You can laugh most people out of their nonsense," was one of Charlie's maxims; and if they did n't respond to the treatment, — he had tried it unsuccessfully on the village cobbler who preached in the tin chapel on Sunday, — he suspected them of being rather wicked.

In the first year of their marriage she had paid him the compliment of disagreement, or, at least, discrimination. She had, until her marriage, thought of herself as a Conservative; to be counted one by Charlie disturbed her sense of rectitude. But Charlie opposed, became puzzled, and finally aggrieved. He bothered and bothered and argued and argued, with the air of trying to bring an erring child to reason. "Now look at it in this light," he would say. Or, "Try to see the thing squarely, Rosamund"; and would turn upon her irrelevant batteries from the *Spectator*. She had at last the sensation of flying, battered and breathless, from his platitudes, and found, soon, her only refuge in duplicity. After that, through all the years of their married life, Charlie, she knew, thought of their evening hours alone together as exceedingly pleasant and successful. He was n't one of your fellows who doze over the *Field* with a cigar after dinner. He had a clever wife and he appreciated her and

was proud — in spite of feminine aberrations affectionately recognized and checked — of what he called her "intellects." He called his father and mother his "respected progenitors" and his stomach was never other than "Little Mary." And while he talked and expounded and made his unexacting jests, Rosamund knew that her silences had no provocation, her smile no irony.

So it had gone on — so it might have gone on for the normal span of life. The only insecurity that had threatened her careful edifice was the question of the boys. The boys were like herself, or, rather, like her adored and brilliant father — proud, sensitive, ardent little creatures, tender-hearted and frightfully intelligent. Physically, too, they were of a different race from Charlie, with thick brown locks, passionate yet gentle eyes, and full, small, closely closing mouths. As boys, Charlie had fairly well understood them, — he got on well with the average boy, — as persons, never; and though as boys, at least as little boys, they got on beautifully with him, they had, as persons, almost at once understood him, even when they were too young to evade or hide from him. If they had not been so young, they would, already, then, have hurt him often.

And for her the boys at once complicated everything. It had been easy, in one way, to yield in non-essentials, though she was woman enough to cry her eyes out when Charlie had taken Philip and Giles, at the earliest age, to have their dear Jeanne-d'Arc heads close-cropped in pursuit of the ideal of manliness; easy, comparatively, to steel her heart when timid little Philip, blanched with terror, was made to ride at six. Charlie had been

right about that, — how glad she had been to own it! — for Philip had, in a week's time, forgotten his fears. But she and Charlie had come near quarrelling over Giles's rag-doll Bessie. Giles was only three and adored Bessie, and Charlie had tossed her in the air, mocked her, and held her up by the toe while Giles sobbed convulsively.

"Do you really want our boys to be milksops, Rosamund?" he had asked, as, refusing to argue, she took the doll from him, placed her in Giles's arms, and kept them both on her lap, pressed within her arms, her head bent down over them so that she need not look at her husband. He had gone away vanquished, and Giles had kept his Bessie, until, in the course of nature, she had dropped away from him.

Worse than this came one day when Charlie had found Philip in a corner writing poetry. He had not been altogether pleased by the children's literary tastes. To grind dutifully at Latin and Greek was one thing, and he was fond of a tag from Tennyson. But he had never cared to read Keats and Shelley when he was a kid. He took the copy-book out of Philip's reluctant hands and, turning from page to page, read out, in mock-dramatic tones, the derivative, boyish efforts, which yet, to her ear, had every now and then their innocent, bird-like note of reality.

"And now this — 'To a Skylark,'" said Charlie, laying a restraining, affectionate hand on Philip's shoulder, wishing him to rise superior to vanity and join in the fun, once it was pointed out to him.

> "'Glad creature from the dew upspringing
> And through the sky your path upwinging!'

Up, up, pretty creature!"

Philip, twisting round under his father's arm, burst into tears of rage, tore the book from his hand and struck him.

It had been a terrible moment, and Rosamund, reduced as she almost was to Philip's condition, had never more admired her husband, who, turning only rather pale, had walked away, saying, "I think you'll be sorry for that when you think it over, old fellow." That he had been astonished, cut to the quick, she had seen, feeling it all for him at the moment of her deepest feeling for Philip.

"I'm not sorry! I'm not sorry!" Philip had sobbed, rushing to her arms and burying his head on her breast. "I'm not sorry! He's stupid! stupid! stupid!"

"Hush, hush," she had said — what a horrid moment it had been! "That is wrong and conceited of you, Philip. You must learn to take a little chaffing. You know how your father loves you."

"It's not conceited! It's not conceited to care about what one tries to do. You know it's not. *You're* not stupid!" the boy had sobbed.

Alas, it had been only four years ago; only a year before the war! Even then, at nine, Philip had been old enough, when he recovered from his weeping, to know that he had hurt her most, had made things difficult for her; and he had been sorry about his father, too, going to him bravely with a tremulous, "Please forgive me, father." "That's all right, old boy," Charlie had said. It *was* all right, too, in a sense. It left not a trace in the sweetness of Charlie's nature. It was Philip who had been shaken, frightened to the very core, by what his own outburst had revealed to himself and

to her. The boy would always have felt affection for his father; but he, too, would soon have protected him; he, too, would hardly miss him.

The moon had now risen far up out of the walnut branches, and flooded the garden with sorrowful brightness. Poor, poor Charlie! was that all it came to, then, for him? this deserted garden and a wife and children who hardly missed him? Why, was it not the very heart of his tragedy for her to see that they would be happier without him? "And he *was* a dear," she said to herself, remembering with an almost passionate determination kind, trustful looks and the happy love of fifteen years ago.

She had been standing still all this while, near the evening primroses; but now, with the great sigh that lifted her breast, she moved forward again, and a bird, disturbed in its rest, flew out from the thick tangle of honeysuckle at the entrance to the summer-house, startling her. As she stopped, her eyes drawn to the spot, she saw, suddenly, that a pale figure was sitting in the summer-house, closely shrunken to one side; hoping in its stillness, — that was apparent, — to remain undiscovered. Ever since she had entered the garden it must have been sitting there; and ever since she had entered the garden it must have been watching her. But why? How strange!

Dispelling a momentary qualm, she stooped her head under the honeysuckle and entered; and then, clearly visible, with her pale hair and face, — as pale, as evident as an evening's primrose, — the girl sitting there, wide-eyed, revealed, with her identity, that haunting analogy of a little while ago. Of course, it came in a flash now, that was what they reminded her of. Long ago she had

thought — conceding them their most lovable association — that Pamela Braithwaite looked like an evening primrose.

"My dear Pamela," she said, almost as gently as she would have said it to a somnambulist; for, like the flowers, again, she was sad, even uncanny; although Pamela's uncanniness too, — sweet, homely creature, — could never be sinister. She put a hand upon her arm, for the girl had started to her feet.

"Oh — do forgive me, Mrs. Hayward!" Pamela gasped. Sad? It was more than that. She was broken, spent with weeping. "I did n't know you were coming. I sit here sometimes in the evenings. I thought you would n't mind."

"My dear child, why should I mind? I'm thankful to you for coming to the sad little place. It's much less lonely to think about, for you have always been so much of our life here."

This, she knew, was an exaggeration; but she must be more than kind to such grief as this: she must find some comfort, if that were possible.

And to feel herself accepted, welcomed, did give comfort; for, sinking again on the seat, bending her face on her hands, Pamela sobbed, "Oh, how kind you are!"

"Poor child, poor, poor child!" said Rosamund. She was only five years older, but she felt as a mother might feel towards the stricken girl. She put an arm around her, murmuring, "Can you tell me what it is? Don't cry so, dear Pamela."

Pamela Braithwaite had been a girl of eighteen when they had come, in the first year of their marriage, to Crossfields. The Braithwaites lived a mile away, near the river, a large, affectionate, des-

ultory family, in a large, dilapidated house. Already Pamela mothered the younger brood, and mothered the widowed father as well — a retired tea-planter, who had brought from Ceylon some undefined but convenient complaint that enabled him to pass the rest of his days wrapped in a number of coats, eating very heartily, and, as he expressed it, "sitting about." A peaceful, idle man, legs outstretched in sun or firelight, hat-brim turned down over his eyes (he had a curious way, even in the house, of almost always wearing his hat), pipe between his teeth; good-looking, too, tall and fair, like his daughters, and with a touch in his appearance, though not in his character, of amicable distinction.

Pamela, except for a brother already married and in Ceylon, was the eldest, with a long gap between her and the group of younger brothers, of whom Rosamund thought mainly as a reservoir of Boy Scouts until they had had to be thought of as a reservoir of volunteers. There were three or four younger sisters, too, some of whom had married and some of whom had gone forth into the world — always with an extreme light-heartedness and confidence — as companions or secretaries. These again were hardly individualized in Rosamund's recollection, except for the fact that, since Pamela was always making blouses or trimming hats for them, she had become aware that it was Phyllis who wore pink and Marjory blue.

But whoever went, Pamela always stayed; and even when the war broke upon the world, with Frank, the Braithwaite baby, just old enough to enlist, and Phyllis and Marjory at once enrolling themselves as V.A.D.'s, Pamela remained rooted.

Who, indeed, had she gone, would have taken care of Mr. Braithwaite, and of the brothers and sisters home on leave, and of the garden earnestly dedicated to potatoes, or the small family of Ceylon nephews and nieces deposited continually in her charge by their parents?

Poor little Pamela! She had had a burdened life; the assiduities of maternity and none of its initial romance. With her large, clear eyes, very far apart, she had always a wistful look; but it was that of a child watching a game and waiting for its turn to come in, and no creature could have given less the impression of weariness or routine. For she had remained, even at thirty-three, the merely bigger sister; an atmosphere of schoolroom tea and the nurture of rabbits and guinea-pigs still hanging about her; her resource and cheerfulness seeming concerned always with the organizing of games, the care of pets, and the soothing of unimportant distresses. Tall, in her scant tweed skirts, her much-repaired white blouse, her slender feet laced into heavy boots, gardening gloves on her hands, so Rosamund had last seen her, a year ago, just before Charlie had been killed, when she had straightened herself from moulding potatoes in the lawn borders and had come forward with her pretty smile to greet her visitor and take her in to tea. Frank had been killed since then, as well as Charlie, but at that time, for both households, the war was splendid adventure rather than sorrow.

Mr. Braithwaite, in the sunny, shabby drawing-room, had stumbled up among his wrappings, to point out to her his accurate flags, advancing or retreating on the many maps that were pinned upon the walls. Frank's last letter had been read

to her, and Dick's and Eustace's; and Pamela had come in and out, helping the maid with the tea (the Braithwaite maids were always as cheerful and desultory as the family, and Rosamund never remembered seeing one of them who had not her cap askew or her cuffs untied), standing to butter the bread herself, the side of the loaf before cutting the slice, after her old schoolroom fashion; her discreet yet generous use of the butter — the crust covered to a nicety and no lumps on the crumb — seeming to express her, as did the pouring out of the excellent tea, drawn to a point and never over, and the pleasant, capacious cups with their gilt rims and the immersed rose which, as one drank, discovered itself at the bottom.

A sweet, old-fashioned, homely creature; like the evening primroses; like them, obliterated, unnoticed in daylight; and like them now, becoming visible, becoming personal, even becoming tragic at this nocturnal hour; for was this really Pamela, sweet, prosaic Pamela, sobbing so broken-heartedly beside her? How meagre, intellectual, and unsubstantial her own grief seemed to Rosamund as she listened, almost aghast, her arm about Pamela's shoulders; and her instinct told her: "It is a man. It is some one she loves — not Frank, but some one she loves far more — who is dead. It is something final and fatal that has broken her down like this." And aloud she repeated: "Can you tell me, Pamela dear? Please try to tell me. It may help you to tell." Her own heart was shaken and tears were in her own eyes.

Between her sobs Pamela answered, "I love him — I love him so much. He is dead. And sometimes I can't bear it."

Rosamund had never heard of a love-affair. But these years of war had done many things, had found out even the hidden Pamelas.

"I did n't know. — My poor child! — I never heard. Were you engaged?"

She had Pamela's ringless hand in hers.

"No! No! It was n't that. No — I've never had any one like that. No one ever knew. He never knew." Pamela lifted her head. Her face seemed now only a message emerging from the darkness; shadowed light upon the shadow, it was expression rather than form. "May I tell you?" she said. "Can you forgive my telling you — here and now, — and to-night, when you've come to be with him? It was Mr. Hayward I loved. I've always loved him. He has been all my life. Ever since you first came here to live."

Rosamund gazed at her, and through all her astonishment there ran an undertone of accomplished presage. Yes, that was it, of course. Had she not been feeling it, seeking it all the evening? — or had it not been seeking her? Here it was, then, the lacking emptiness. Desolate voids seemed to open upon her in Pamela's shadowy eyes. She tightly held the ringless hand and felt, presently, that she pressed it against her heart where something pierced her. Was it pity for Pamela? or for Charlie? This was his; had always been his. And Pamela, who had had nothing, had lost everything. "My dear!" she murmured.

"Oh, how kind you are!" said Pamela. She sat quiet, looking down at their two hands held against Rosamund's heart. And with all the austerity of her grief she had never been more childlike in Rosamund's eyes. Like a child, once the barriers of

shyness were down and trust established, she would confide everything.

Rosamund knew how it must help her to confide. "Tell me if you will," she said. "I am glad you loved him, if it has not hurt you too much. You understand, don't you, that I must be glad — for him?"

"Yes, oh, yes; I understand. How beautiful of you to see it all! — Even though it's so little, it is his; something he did; and so you must care. But I don't think there's much to tell; nothing about him that you don't know."

"About you, then. About what he was to you."

"That would simply be my whole life," said Pamela. "It's so wonderful of you to understand and not to blame me. So many people would have thought it wrong; but it came before I knew what it was going to be, and I never can feel that it was wrong. He never knew. And even if he had, it could n't have made any difference. It must be because of that that I can tell you. If you had n't been so happy, if it had n't been so perfect — for you and him — I don't think that I could have told. I should just have rushed away when you came in and hidden from you."

"Why?" asked Rosamund after a moment. She heard something in her own voice that Pamela would not hear.

"I don't quite know why," said Pamela; "but don't you feel it too? Perhaps if it had n't been so perfect, even my little outside love might have hurt you — or troubled you — to hear about. But I see now that you are the only person in the world who could care to hear. It is a comfort to tell you. I am so glad you came." Pamela turned her eyes

upon her and it was almost with her smile. "When I see you like this I can believe that he is here, listening with you, and sorry for me, too."

How like an evening primrose she was! Rosamund could see her clearly now: the candid oval of the face, the eyes, the innocent, child forehead with thick, fair hair falling across it.

"Yes. Go on," she said, smiling back.

She was not worthy of Pamela, and poor Charlie was not worthy of her; but no human being is worthy of a flower. And though so innocent, she was not stupid; subtlety like a fragrance was about her as she said, "You can comfort me because you have so much to comfort with."

"So much grief, or so much remembered happiness?"

"They go together, don't they?" said Pamela. "Every sort of fulness. But I need n't try to get it clear. You understand. I always thought that perhaps people who had fulness could n't; now I see that I was mistaken."

"Have you been very unhappy, dear child?"

"Until now? While he was here? Oh, no, I have been lonely. Even before he came, even though my life was so crowded, it was rather lonely. I never had any one of my own, for myself. But afterwards, even if I felt lonely, I was happy. At least, after just at first. Because, just at first, it was miserable, for I could n't help longing to see him more and to have him like me more, and that made me understand that I was in love with him, and I was frightened. I can't explain clearly about it, even to myself. But I was very, very unhappy. Perhaps you remember the time when I was twenty, and got so run down, and they sent me to

Germany to my old governess — the only time I ever went away from home, out of England. It was a miserable time. I tried not to think of him and not to care. But I had to come back, and he was there, and I knew I could n't stop caring, and that all I could do about it was to try to be better because of him, — you know, — and make people happier, and not think of myself, but of him and them. And everything changed after that. I was never frightened any more, and though perhaps it was n't exactly happiness, it was, sometimes, I believe, almost better. I can't explain it, but what I mean is in some poetry. I never cared much about poetry till he came. Then I seemed to understand things I'd never understood before, and to feel everything that was beautiful.

"You remember how dear he was to us all — to the boys and me. I always shared in everything they did. Every bit of this country is full of him; I could never bear to go away and leave it. I want always to stay here till I die. — Flowers and birds — was n't he wonderful about them? And our walks in the woods! He saw everything, and made us see it. I never woke in the morning without thinking, Will he come to-day? What will he say and do? I was never tired of watching him and listening to him. All his little ways — you know. When I pleased him, — sometimes I saw the bird we were watching for first, or caught my trout well, — it was a red-letter day. And in big things — to feel I should have pleased him if he'd known. It was he who helped me in every way, without knowing it. And I took more and more joy in you. At first I had felt dreadfully shy with you — and afraid of you. You were so clever, with all your books and

music and friends, and you did n't seem to need anything. But afterwards you were so kind, that, though I was always shy, I was not frightened any longer. I used to think about you so much, and imagine what he felt about you — and you about him. — You won't mind my saying it, I know. Perhaps you remember the way I used so often, in the evenings, to walk past with the children, and say good-night over the wall. That was to see you and him walking together. You were so beautiful! You are far and far away the most beautiful person I've ever known. I always noticed everything you wore, and how your hair was done. I was glad when you took it down from the knot and had it all at the back, as you do now. And the lovely pale blue dress, with the little flounces — do you remember? — a summer dress of lawn. I did love that. And the white linen coats and skirts, and the big white hat with the lemon-coloured bow. Your very shoes — those grey ones you always had, with the low heels and little silver buckles. No one had such lovely clothes. And the way you poured out tea and looked across the table at one. Always like a beautiful muse — you don't mind my saying it? — a little above everything, and apart, and quietly looking on. — How I understood what he felt for you! I felt it, too, I think, with him."

Yes, dear flower and child, she had: offering to Charlie that last tribute of a woman's worship, the imaginative love of the woman he loves; cherishing the cruelly sweet closeness of that piercing community. How she had idealized them both. How she had idealized Charlie's love. Charlie had never seen her like this. Charlie had never dreamed of her as a muse, above, apart, and quietly watching.

Why, with Pamela's Charlie she herself could almost have been in love!

"What did you talk about, you and he," she asked, "when you were together?" Their sylvan life, Pamela's and Charlie's, was almost as unknown to her as that of the birds they watched. She had almost a soft small hope that perhaps Pamela could show her something she had missed. "Did you ever talk about poetry, for instance?"

"No; never about things like that," Pamela answered. "He talked more to the boys than to me; he talked to us all together — about what we were doing. But I used to love listening to him when he came and talked to father. Politics, you know; and the way things ought to be done. He was a great deal discouraged, you remember, by the way they *were* being done. All those unjust taxes, you know. He wanted, he used always to say, to *give* to the poor himself; he *loved* taking care of them. But he hated that his money should be taken from him like that, against his will. And he always, always foresaw the war; always knew that Germany was plotting, and how England swarmed with spies. He thought we ought to have declared war upon her long ago and struck first. — I'm rather glad we did n't, are n't you? because then, in a way, we should have been in the wrong rather than they; but of course he felt it as a statesman, not like an ignorant woman. — You think Germany plotted, too?"

"Yes, oh, yes." How glad Rosamund was to be able to think it, to be able, here, with a clear conscience, to remember that, on the theme of Germany's craft and crime, she and Charlie had thought quite sufficiently alike. "But I am with you about not striking first."

"Are you really?" There was surprise in Pamela's voice. She did not dwell on the slight perplexity. "Of course, he always worsted father if he disagreed. It was rather wicked of me, but I could n't help enjoying seeing father worsted. He'd never thought things out, as Mr. Hayward had. But that's what he talked about — things like that — and you."

"Me?" Rosamund's voice was gentle, meditative — her old voice of the encounters with Charlie. How she could hear him through all Pamela's candid recitative!

"He was always thinking about you. 'My wife says so and so. My wife agrees with me about it. I brought my wife last night to see it as I do.' Oh, you were with him in everything! It was so beautiful to see and hear! I used to imagine that the Brownings were like that — after I read their lives. He *was* a sort of poet, was n't he? Any one so loving and so happy is a sort of poet — even if they don't write poetry. Down in the meadows one day, when we were watching lapwings, he and I and the boys, — he wanted to show us a nest; you know how difficult they are to find, — you passed up on the hillside, with Philip and Giles. We could see you against the larchwood, they in their holland smocks and you in white, with the white-and-yellow hat. I shall never forget the way he stood up and smiled, his eyes following you. 'There's Rosamund and the progeny,' he said. — You know the dear, funny way he had of saying things."

Yes — she knew it. Yet tears had risen to Rosamund's eyes. Dear old Charlie; dear, old, tiresome Charlie! The tears had come as she saw him standing to look after her and his boys; but there was

nothing more, nothing that she could give to Pamela, not one crumb of enrichment from what Pamela believed to be her great store. Pamela had seen all — and more than all — that there was to see.

In her own silence now she was aware of a growing oppression. She was too silent, even for one mute from the depth and sacredness of memory. Might not such silence seem to reprove Pamela's flooding confidence? She struggled with her thoughts. "The lapwings?" she heard herself murmuring. "I remember his showing me a nest. How he loved birds and how much he knew about them! Were n't you with us on the day we put up all the nesting-boxes here? Do you remember how he planned for the placing of each one, each bird to have its own appropriate domain? It was a lovely day, in very early spring."

"Oh — *do* you remember that?" How Pamela craved the crumb was shown by her lightened face; it was almost happy, as it turned to Rosamund, with its sense of recovered treasures. "Very early spring — March. Snowdrops were up over there, — and there, — and there were daffodils at the foot of the wall. You were in blue: a frieze coat and skirt of Japanese blue, with a grey silk scarf and a little soft grey hat with a blue wing in it; and you said, — you were standing just over there, near the pond, — 'We can always count on tits.' But you did get robins, too, and thrushes in the big boxes; and then the splendid year when the nuthatches came to the box down in the orchard. And you were tying up one box, but it was too high and he came and did it for you. I can see you both so plainly, your hands stretching up against the sky.

Tall as you are he was taller; his head seemed to tower up into the branches. Such a blue sky it was! And afterwards we had tea in the drawing-room, and the tea was n't strong enough for him, and you liked China and he Indian tea. And you teased him and said that you had always to make him the little brown pot all for himself. He said, 'Tea never tastes so right as out of a brown pot.' There were white tulips growing in a bowl on the tea-table. And then you played to us. And you sang — 'I need no star in heaven to guide me.' He was so fond of that. Oh, do you remember it all, too?"

All — all. Rosamund, though her tears fell, felt her cheek flushing in the darkness. How often he had asked for "I need no star in heaven to guide me"! How often she had sung it to him, rejoicing so soon, while she threw the proper tumultuous fervour that Charlie loved into the foolish air, in the atoning thought that already Philip's favourite was "Der Nussbaum" and that even little Giles asked for "the sheep song," the bleak, beautiful old Scottish strain: "Ca' the yowes to the knowes," with its sweetest drop to "my bonnie dearie." "Oh — give us something cheerful!" Charlie would exclaim after it.

"I remember it all, dear," she answered; and there was silence for a while.

"How do you bear it?" Pamela whispered suddenly.

The hour, the stillness, the hands that held her, drew her past the last barrier. Her broken heart yearned for the comfort that the greater loss alone could give. What was the strength that enabled his wife to sit there so quietly, so gently, so full of peace and pity?

Rosamund felt herself faltering, stumbling, as she heard the inevitable question, and knew, as it came, that even Pamela's heavenly blindness might not protect her, unless she could be very careful, from horrid loss or suspicion. To touch with a breath of her daylight reality that silver world of recollection would be to desecrate. Could she hold her breath and tread softly while she answered? Yes, surely. Surely she, who had hidden through all the years from Charlie, could hide from Pamela, although Pamela already was nearer than Charlie and knew her better than he had ever done. All the old strength and resource welled up in her, protecting this lovely thing, as, after the long moment, not looking at Pamela, but into Charlie's garden, she found the right answer.

"You see, dear, it is so different with me. You have only your memories. I have the boys — his boys — to live for."

It was right. It was the only answer. She heard Pamela's long, soft breaths, full of a gentle awe, and felt her hand more tightly clasped. Once the right step was taken, it was easier to go on:

"I want to tell you why I am so glad to have found you here, Pamela dear. You'll understand, I think, when I say that motherhood lives in the present and future, and is almost cruel, cruel to everything not itself, for it forgets the past in the present. Do you see," — she found the beautiful untruth, — "he is so much in them for me, that I might almost forget him in them — forget to mourn him, as one would if they were not there. So do you see why it comforts me to know that, while I must go on into the future with them, you will be keeping him here and remembering?"

She could look at Pamela now, in safety, and she turned to her, finding rapt eyes upon her.

"Come here often, won't you, when I'm away as well as when I'm here. We must make it all look again as it did when he was with us — flowers and trees and bird-boxes. You will help me in it all and you will think of him here and love him. I know what happiness you meant to him — more than he was aware of. You were a beautiful part of his life. You say you were always, for him, only together, with the boys. That is only partly true. He used often to speak of you to me, the little passing things people say of any one they are very fond of and take for granted. He appreciated you and counted upon you. I came here so sad, Pamela, so burdened. I've never been sadder in my life than I was to-night as I walked here. And you have lifted it all. It makes all the difference to know that you are here, in his garden, remembering him. More difference than I can say."

It was an unutterable gratitude that, with her tears, with love and pity and reverence, welled up in her, seeing what Pamela had done. The garden was no longer empty, and Charlie not forgotten. In the night of his death and disappearance this flower had become visible. Always, when she thought of him, she would think of evening primroses and of Pamela, so that it would be with tenderness, with the understanding, homely, unexacting, consecrating, that Pamela gave; Pamela herself becoming a gift from Charlie; emerging from the darkness, evident and beautiful, — almost another child whose future she must carry in her heart; though the only gift she could give her now, in return for all that she had given, was the full and free posses-

sion of the past, where, outside the garden wall, she had been a wistful onlooker. She felt that she opened the gate, drew Pamela in, and put into her keeping all the keys that had weighed so heavily in her unfitted hands.

AUTUMN CROCUSES

I

"WHAT you need is a complete change, and quiet," said his cousin Dorothy.

Guy, indeed, in spite of his efforts to keep up appearances, was a dismal figure. He had been passing the teacups and the bread and butter, enduring all the jests about sugar-rations and margarine, and enduring, which was so much worse, the complacencies over the approaching end of the war. His haggard face, narrow-jawed and high-foreheaded, expressed this endurance rather than any social amenity, and he was aware that Aunt Emily could hardly feel that the presence of her poet and soldier nephew added much to her tea-party. Indeed, the chattering, cheerful women affected his nerves almost as painfully as did the sound of the motor-buses when — every day it happened — he stopped on the curb, after leaving his office in Whitehall, and wondered how long it would take him to summon courage to cross the street. He felt, then, like breaking down and crying; and he felt like it now when they said, "Is n't it all *too* splendid!"

Cousin Dorothy was as chattering and as cheer-

ful as the rest of them, and she had every reason to be, he remembered, with Tom, her *fiancé*, ensconced in Paris, safe after all his perils. Dorothy, though like everybody else she had worked hard during the war, had seen nothing and lost nothing. And she had never had any imagination. All the same, he was thankful when she rescued him from the woman who would talk to him idiotically about his poetry (she evidently had n't understood a word of it), and took him into a quiet nook near the piano.

It might, then, have been mere consanguinity, for he had never before found intimacy possible where Dorothy was concerned; or it might have been a symptom of his state (his being at Aunt Emily's tea-party at all was that!); but, at all events after admitting that Mrs. Dickson had been boring him, he found himself presently confessing his terrors about the motor-buses, his terror of the dark, his sleeplessness and general disintegration. His nervous laugh was a concession to Dorothy's possible misunderstanding; but as he went on, he felt himself almost loving her for the matter-of-factness she infused into her sympathy. After all, even good old Dorothy was n't stupid enough to suspect him of cowardice; and although, from a military point of view, he had made such a mess of it (invalided home again and again on account of digestive complaints, and finally, last spring, transferred to his small official post in London), to any one, really, who had at all followed his career, it would be apparent that no one could have stuck harder to the loathly job. He had felt it that, and only that, even while, prompted by pride, he had made his effort to enlist, in the first months of the war. It had been

with a deep relief that he had found himself at once rejected and free to stay behind, free to serve humanity with his gift rather than with his inefficiency; for he took his poetic vocation with a youthful seriousness. And when, later on, through one of the blunders of medical examinations, he was drawn into the net of conscription, no one could have denied that he marched off to the shambles with unflinching readiness.

Dorothy, he saw, took courage all along for granted: "It's simply a case of shell-shock," she said, as if it were her daily fare; "you're queer and jumpy, and you can't stand noise. It's quite like Tommy."

He could n't associate Tommy, short-nosed, round-headed, red-eared Tommy, with anything of the sort, and said so in some resentment. But Dorothy assured him that for some months — just a year ago — Tommy had been at home on sick leave, and really bad enough for anything. "He suffered in every way just as you do."

Guy was quite sure he had n't, but he did not want to argue about it. For nothing in the world would he have defined to Dorothy what he really suffered.

"It's country air you need; country food and country quiet," Dorothy went on. "You *can* get away?"

"Oh, yes; I can get away all right. Old Forsyth is most decent about it. He was telling me this morning that I ought to take a month."

"I wonder if Mrs. Baldwin could have you at Thatches," Dorothy mused. "Tommy got well directly."

"Mrs. Baldwin?" His voice, he knew, expressed

an unflattering scepticism, but he could n't help it. "Is she at home — an institution?" He saw Mrs. Baldwin, hatefully tactful, in a Red Cross uniform. "No, thank you, my dear."

"Of course not. What do you take me for?" Dorothy kept her competent eyes upon him. "It's not even a P.G. place — at all events, not a regular one, though of course you do pay for your keep. She has very narrow means and takes friends sometimes, and, since the war, it's just happened — by people telling each other, as I'm telling you — to be shell-shock cases rather particularly. It's a lovely country, and a dear, quaint little cottage, and she does you most awfully well, Tommy said."

"I don't like the idea of settling down like that on a stranger."

"But she would n't be a stranger. You'd go through me, and I feel as if I knew her already through Tommy. He said he was at home at once. 'Cosy,' was how he expressed it. And you get honey on your bread at tea and cream in your coffee at breakfast, and all sorts of delightful things *en casserole*, that she cooks with her own hands, quite equal, Tommy said, to the French. And, Tommy knows, *now*, you see."

"It's Mrs. Baldwin herself who frightens me. She frightens me more than the motor-buses in Whitehall."

"That's just what she won't do. She's perfectly sweet. Cosy. Middle-aged. A widow. Her nice old father lives with her, and Tommy liked him so much, too. You help her to garden, and with the bees, you know. And the old father plays chess with you in the evenings. There's a stream near by where you can fish if you want to. It's late for

that, of course; but Tommy got some quite good sport; he was there at just this time of year. And he said that it was most awfully jolly country, and that the meadows all about were full of autumn crocuses."

"Autumn crocuses? In the fields? I've never seen them wild."

"They do grow wild, though, in some parts of England. They are wild there. Tommy particularly wrote about them. He said one walked down to the stream among the autumn crocuses."

Dorothy was baiting her hook very prettily, and he gloomily smiled his recognition of it. "They do sound attractive," he owned. He had n't imagined Tom a man to notice crocuses, and he was the more inclined to trust his good impressions further. After all, apart from Mrs. Baldwin and her father, the country, with honey, cream, and autumn crocuses, was a happy combination, if he had been in condition for feeling anything happy.

What would Dorothy have thought of him, could she have known that, while they talked, her rosy, bonnie face kept constantly, before his haunted eyes, dissolving into a skull? Faces had a way of doing this with him since his last encounter with the war in the spring. And all the people talking in the room squeaked and gibbered. How could they go on talking? How could they go on living — after what had happened? How could he? The familiar nausea rose in him even as he forced himself to smile and say, "Well, could she have me — Mrs. Baldwin?"

He could not have made an effort to find a place for himself. Such efforts, he felt sure, would have landed him at some God-forsaken farmhouse

miles from the station, where the beds were damp and the meat tough; or, even worse, at a Bournemouth hotel, amid orchestras and people who made a point of dressing for dinner. But, if some one found it for him, he would let himself be pushed off.

"I'm sure she could," said Dorothy with conviction. "I have her address and I'll write tonight and tell her all about you: that you're a rising poet, and that your friends and relations will be *so* grateful if she'll do for you what she did for Tommy."

He had an ironic glance for her "rising." His relations — and Aunt Emily and her brood were the nearest left to him — had never in the least taken in his standing or realized that he was, among people who knew, looked upon as completely risen. At the same time, sunken was what he felt himself; drowned deep; too deep, he sometimes thought, for recovery. His last little volume had been like a final fight for breath. He had written most of it over there, after Ronnie's death and before his own decisive breakdown, and he knew it a result as much of his malady as of his war experience.

He wondered now, anew, whether these people had really read the poems. If they had, it only showed how impervious to reality they must remain. And there had actually been one, written after one of his leaves, called "Eating Bread-and-Butter," that should indeed have embarrassed them, had they remembered it, inviting them to eat it with him in a trench with unburied comrades lying in No-Man's Land before them. His head, as he thought of that, — from unburied comrades passing to unburied friends, — gave a nervous,

backward jerk, for he had told himself before that he *must* stop thinking in certain directions; and indeed the poems had helped to exorcise the obsession at the time when they had been written.

All the same, it was very strange — such a poet at such a tea-party. He had plunged into Aunt Emily's tea-party as he plunged nowadays into anything that presented itself as offering distraction. And now, as he said, "Well, if you'll put it through, I'll go, and be very grateful to you," he felt that he was making another plunge into Mrs. Baldwin's cottage.

II

It was a pretty cottage he found, as, on the September evening, his station fly drew up at the wicket-gate. They had come a long way from the station, and, after leaving a small village, the winding lane, too, had seemed long. He saw, nevertheless, as he alighted, that the rustic building, old stones below and modern thatch above, could not be far from the central group of which it formed an adjunct; for it had been contrived, by devices dear to the heart of the week-ender, from two or three labourers' cottages thrown into one and covered all over with the capacious and brooding thatch. "Quaint," Dorothy's really inevitable word, altogether expressed it, from the box hedges that ran on either side of the flagged path, to the pale yellow hollyhocks beside the door.

A round-cheeked country girl, neatly capped and aproned, opened the door on a square, rush-matted hall; and beyond that he saw a room full of the sunset, where a table was being laid and from which Mrs. Baldwin came out to greet him.

She was not tall, and had thick, closely bound braids. He had dreaded finding himself at once dealt with as a case; but Mrs. Baldwin's manner was not even that of one accustomed to paying guests. Her murmur of welcome, her questions about his journey, her mild directions as she led him up to his room, "Be careful at this landing, the level of the floor goes up and the beam comes down so low," — were rather those of a shy and entirely unprofessional hostess.

He thought, as soon as he took in his room, with its *voile-de-Gènes* hangings and dear old furniture, that he pleased her by saying, "What a delicious room!" and even more when, on going to the wide, low, mullioned window, its panes open to the west, he added, "And what a delicious view!" There were meadows and tall hedgerow elms, and, running in a tranquil band of brightness, the stream that reflected the sky.

She did not say that she was glad he liked it, but her very gentle smile at the welcome it all made for him was part of the welcome. What she did say was, with the little air of shy preoccupation, while she wrung her finger-tips together, those of one hand in those of the other, "I think the water's very hot. I have a rather young little maid. You'll tell me if you want anything. Are three blankets and the down quilt enough? The nights are rather cold already."

He said that three would be perfect, secure, from his glance at the deep, comely bed, that they would be beautifully thick and fleecy.

"Then you'll come down to us when you are ready." She stood in the door to look round again. "Matches here, you see; biscuits in the little earth-

enware box; and the spirit-lamp is in case you should wake in the night — you could make yourself a cup of cocoa? Everything is there — cocoa, milk, and sugar. It usually sends one off again directly."

It was all the slightly shy hostess rather than the businesslike soother and sustainer; and, no, it was n't a bit cosy. He repudiated that word indignantly, while he washed — the water *was* very hot, admirably hot; there was a complacency about cosy, and Mrs. Baldwin had no complacency, though she was, for all her shyness and the unconscious gestures of physical nervousness, composed. Her hands, he remembered, recalling their little trick, — he had noticed it in the hall, — were like a child's; not the hands of a practical housewife. Yet, from the look of that bed (yes, thank heaven, a box-spring mattress!), from the heat of the water, and, above all, the deft and accessible grouping of the spirit-lamp and its adjuncts, she proved that she knew how to make one comfortable.

There were the meadows and — going again to the window, he wondered leaning out, — could he see the autumn crocuses? Yes, surely; even at this evening hour his eyes distinguished the pale yet delicately purpling tint that streaked the pastoral verdure. What a delicious place, indeed! He stood, absorbed in looking out, until the maid came to say that supper would be ready in five minutes.

The long room, the living-room, — for it combined, he saw, all social functions, — also faced the meadows at the back of the house, and the primrose coloured sunset still filled it as he entered. Mrs. Baldwin was busying herself with the table, and an old gentleman with a very long white beard rose, with much dignity, from the grandfather's chair

near a window-seat. Mr. Haseltine, so his daughter named him, had more the air of seeing the visitor as a P.G., perhaps even as a shell-shock patient; but he was a nice old man, Guy felt, although his beard was too long. He wore a brown velveteen jacket, and Guy surmised that he might have been a writer or scholar of some not very significant sort.

"Yes, we think ours a very favored nook indeed," he said, as Guy again praised the prospect. "Yes; three cottages. Very happily contrived, is it not? There is a clever builder in the next town. He kept the old fireplace, you see; that end was a kitchen and the beams are all the old ones. Three gardens, too, thrown into one; but that is entirely my daughter's creation. Pig-styes used to be in that corner."

Guy looked out at the squares of colour, the low beds of mignonette, the phloxes, larkspurs, and the late sweet-peas a screen of stained-glass tints against the sky. Where the pig-styes had been was a little thatched summer-house with rustic seat and table. The bee-hives were just outside the hedge, at an angle of the meadow. Mr. Haseltine continued to talk while Mrs. Baldwin and the maid came in and out, carrying tea and eggs and covered dishes.

"I hope you don't mind high tea," she said. "It seems to go with our life here."

He felt that high tea was his favourite meal. There was a big white earthenware bowl on the table, filled with sweet-peas. "Where do you get the old-fashioned colours?" he asked her. "I thought the growers had extirpated them; one sees only the long-stemmed ones nowadays, with the tiresome artistic shades."

He pleased her again, he felt sure, and she told

him that she always saved the seed, liking the old bright colours better, too.

He was glad that he had come, although Mr. Haseltine's beard was too long and he feared that he would prove talkative in the worst way, the deliberate and retaining way. He liked the smell of everything, — a mingling of sweet-peas, rush-matting, and China tea, — and the look of everything; good, unpretentious old oak furniture, fresh, if faded, chintzes, and book-lined walls; and he presently liked the taste of everything too.

"I feel already as if I should sleep to-night," he said to Mrs. Baldwin.

She sat behind the tea-urn a little distracted, if anything so mild could be called distraction, by the plunging movements of the little maid as she moved about the table. "That will do nicely, Cathy," she said. "We can manage now. You can bring in some more hot water if I ring. — Oh, I do hope you'll sleep. People usually sleep here."

She was hardly middle-aged, though, after Dorothy's bright browns and pinks, Tommy might well have thought her so. Many years older than Dorothy, of course, yet how many he could not in the least compute. There was an agelessness, with something tough and solid, about her; she was as little slender as she was stout; she might, with her neutral tints, — hair, skin, dress, — have looked almost the same at sixty as she did now. She was n't pale, or sallow, or sunburned; yet her complexion seemed so to go with her hair that the whole head might have been carved in some pleasantly tinted stone. Only her eyes gave any depth of difference; gentle eyes, like a grey-blue breadth of evening. She had a broad, short face and broad,

beautifully drawn lips, and looked almost mysteriously innocent.

Guy took her in to this extent, swift as he was at taking people in, and sensitive as he was to what he found. He felt sure — and the depth of comfort it gave him made him aware of all the reluctances Dorothy's decision had overborne — that she had n't the ghost of a method or of a theory. Shell-shock people had merely happened to come and had happened to get well quickly. He even gathered, as the peaceful evening wore on, — Cathy clearing, placid lamps lighted, the windows still left open to the twilight, — that she did n't really think very much about her cases, in so far as they were cases and not guests. Having done her best in the way of blankets, hot water, and spirit-kettles, and seen them settled down into the life she had made for herself, — and not at all for them, — she went her own way, irresponsible and unpreoccupied.

To-night she did n't attempt to entertain him. It was Mr. Haseltine, at supper, who kept up the conversation, and with the air of always keeping it up, with even the air, Guy imagined once or twice, of feeling it specially his part to make amends, in that sort of resource, for his dear daughter's deficiency. She was, Guy saw, very much his dear daughter; but he felt sure that it had never entered the old gentleman's head that any one would find her interesting when he himself was there.

After supper she was occupied for a little while at her desk, adding up figures, it appeared, in house-books; for she came to her father and asked him if he would do a column for her. "It has come out differently three times with me," she confessed, but without ruefulness. "I'm so dull at my accounts!"

Guy, as Mr. Haseltine fumbled for his large tortoise-shell eyeglasses, offered to help her, and then came over and sat beside the desk and did the rest of the sums for her. She was tidying up for the month, she told him, and always found it rather confusing. "It's having to put the pennies, which are twelves, into pounds, which are twenties, is n't it?" she said, and thanked him so much.

But this could hardly be called entertaining him, nor could it, when he accompanied her across the lane in the now deepening dusk, to shut up her fowls. After that, there was the game of chess, during which Mrs. Baldwin absented herself a good deal, helping Cathy, Guy imagined, with the beds and hot-water bottles; and at nine-thirty they all lighted their candles and went upstairs.

Bedtime had been, for many months, his most dreaded moment. The door shut him in and shut away the last chance of alleviation. There was nothing for it but to stretch himself haggardly on his couch and cling to every detail in the day's events, or in the morrow's prospects, that might preserve him from the past. To fight *not* to remember was a losing game, and filled one's brain with the white flame of insomnia. He had found that it was when, exhausted by the fruitless effort, he suffered the waiting vultures to settle upon him, abandoned himself to the beaks and talons, that, through the sheer passivity of anguish, oblivion most often came.

To-night, from the habit of it, his mind braced itself as he came into the room, and he was aware, as he had been for nearly a year now, that Ronnie's face was waiting, as it were, on the outskirts of consciousness, to seize upon him. But, after he had

lighted the candles on his dressing-table and the candles on the mantelpiece, taken off his coat, and started undressing, he found that his thoughts, quite effortlessly, were engaged with his new surroundings, old Mr. Haseltine's beard and eyeglasses occupying them, and the clucking noise he made in drinking the glass of hot ginger and water that had been brought to them on a tray while they played; Mrs. Baldwin's accounts, her fowls, and the colour of her eyes. He decided that the colour was Wedgwood, or perhaps periwinkle blue — some very dense, quiet colour.

As he moved about the room, this protective interest came to him from the little objects he made acquaintance with: the round Venetian box, dim gilt and blue and red, on the chest of drawers in which he found a handful of tiny shells — shells, no doubt, that Mrs. Baldwin had picked up during a seaside outing; the faded old blue leather blotter on the writing-table, marked E. H., which had probably been hers since maiden days (and did E stand for Ethel or Edith or Ellen?); the pretty lettering in fine black script of the writing-paper so pleasantly stacked; the dear old Dutch coffee-pot and jug on the mantelpiece, and the bowl of mignonette that she, of course, had arranged. He sank his face into its fragrance, and peace seemed breathed upon him from the flowers.

He was wondering, as he got into bed, with a glance, before he blew out the candle, at the birds and branches, the whites and blacks and roses of the *voile-de-Gènes*, whether he would find the autumn crocuses open in the meadows next morning; it had looked like the evening of another fine day. Then, the candle out, his thoughts, for a little

while, were tangled in the magical dreamland of the *voile-de-Gènes*, and the breath of the mignonette seemed to lie upon his eyelids with a soft compulsion to peace, until, all thought sliding suddenly away, he dropped into delicious slumber.

III

He found the crocuses open, before breakfast. Only Cathy was in the living-room, sweeping, when he crossed it, though he thought he heard Mrs. Baldwin in the kitchen. A robin was singing on a spray over the summer-house. The sky arched pale and high; and though there was no mist in the air, its softness made him think of milk.

From the garden he passed into the meadows, and, almost at once, saw, everywhere, the fragile, purple flowers about him, if purple were not too rich a word for their clear, cold tint. Lower down, near the stream, they made him think of the silver bobbins set playing by great rain drops when they fall heavily upon wide, shallow pools of water; and they seemed to grow even more thickly in the farther meadow beyond the wooden bridge. A sense of bliss was upon him as he walked among the flowers. He had never seen anything more lovely, and all but the darker buds were open, showing pale golden hearts to the sun.

Yet, by the time that he had crossed the bridge, leaning on the high rail to look down into the limpid, sliding water, he knew that it could never stay at that or mean that for him. He had seen fields of flowers in France, and, while the horrors there had been enacted, these fields of crocuses, year after year, had bloomed. What they meant for his mind

was the unbridged chasm between nature and the sufferings of man. Only when one ceased to be a man, ceased to remember and to think, could such a day, such sights, bring the unreasoning joy.

Walking back, he saw, as he approached the house, that Mrs. Baldwin was standing at the garden-gate, and, bare-headed, in the linen dress of pale lavender, she made him at once think of the crocuses, or they of her. Their gentleness was like her, their simplicity, and something, too, — for he felt this in her, — of unearthliness. More perhaps, than any other flower they seemed to belong to the air rather than to the ground, and, with their faint, pale stalks, their fragile petals unconfined by leaf or calyx, to be rising like emanations from the sod and ready to dissolve in mist into the sunlight.

"You've had a little walk?" Mrs. Baldwin asked him as they met.

He said he had been looking at the crocuses. "Are they really crocuses?" he questioned. "I've never seen them wild before."

"They're not real crocuses," she said, "though those grow wild, too, in a few places in England. These flowers are always called autumn crocuses hereabouts; but they are really, botanically, meadow saffron; and they grow wild in a great many places. You see they are not so dark a purple as the wild crocus, and they are much taller, and the petals are more pointed. Much more beautiful flowers, I think."

"Meadow saffron. That's a pretty name, too. But I think I'll go on calling them autumn crocuses. They were one of the reasons that made me want to come here," he told her.

They were leaning on the little garden-gate looking over the meadows.

"Really? Did you hear about them?"

He told her what Dorothy had said, passed on from the appreciative Tommy, and she said again, "Really!" and with surprise, so that, laughing a little, he said that he believed she would never have thought of Mr. Barnet as an appreciator of crocuses. She laughed a little, too, confessing to a community of perception where Tommy was concerned, and remarked that it was very nice of him to have cared. "What he talked about," she said, "was the food. He was never done praising my coffee. It's time for coffee now," she added.

Guy, as they went in, said that, after all, if that was what Tommy talked about, he wondered that his caring for the crocuses should have surprised her, for he was sure that the one was almost as poetical as the others. It was poetical, indeed, as she made it, in a delightful and complicated apparatus, glass and brass and premonitory scented steam; and the milk was as hot as the water had been, and there was cream. "How do you manage it, in these days?" he asked. But she said that it was n't wickedness and bribery, really: she and Cathy skimmed it from the milk that was brought from the nearest farm.

He realized that he was himself talking about the food just as Tommy had done; just as the chattering women at Aunt Emily's tea-party had done; just as everybody, of course, had been doing in England ever since food became such an important matter. But it was Mrs. Baldwin who made him do it; for though unearthly, she was deliciously prosaic. He felt that anew when he heard her going

about the house in her low-heeled little shoes, with Cathy. They did, evidently, all the work, and how fresh, composed, and shining everything was. The living-room, with its happy southern windows, its tempting writing-tables, its flowers and books, was an embodiment of the poetry that only such prose can secure.

Guy, while Mr. Haseltine sat behind his rustling *Times*, strolled before the shelves, surprised, presently, at their range of subject. Surely not Mrs. Baldwin's, such reading; hardly, he thought, Mr. Haseltine's. He took down a volume of Plotinus and found, on the fly-leaf, "Oliver Baldwin," written in a small, scholarly hand. That explained it, then. Her husband's. The Charles d'Orléans, too, the Fustel de Coulanges, the Croce, and the Dante, with marginal notes. He had been a man of letters, perhaps. Of the dozen books he took down to examine, only one was initialled "E. H.," and that, suitably, was *Dominique*. But it had been given her by "O. B."

As in the garden, presently, he and the old gentleman walked up and down, smoking, Guy asked him, with the diffidence natural to the question, whether his son-in-law, Mrs. Baldwin's husband, had been killed in the war; though he could n't imagine her a war-widow. One did n't indeed think of her in connection with marrying and giving in marriage — that was part of the unearthliness; yet widowhood, permanent widowhood, seemed a suitable state. She was not girlish, nor was she wifely. She was widowed, and it had happened, he felt sure, in spite of his question, long ago.

As he had expected, his companion replied, "Ah, no; he died eight, nine years since." And Mr.

Haseltine then went on to tell, taking the war as the obvious interest, and not without the satisfaction that Guy had so often met and so often loathed, that he had lost dear ones. "Children of my eldest son. Fine lads. Brave boys. One in the first month — at the Marne; the other only last year, flying. Yes; I've done my bit," said Mr. Haseltine, with the fatuity that he was so plentifully companioned in displaying.

"Bit." Odious word. His "bit." Why his? Had any one written a poem on the formula coming from the lips of those for whom others had died? A scattered, flagellating line or two floated through Guy's mind. Something about barbed wire came in. He wondered how old Mr. Haseltine would have felt about his "bit," hung up on that and unable to die. He wondered where the fine lads now lay. No more coffee for them, with cream in it; no more robins singing; no more strolling smokes among mignonette in the sunlight. How they were forgotten, already, except for trophies, for self-glorification to display! How pleased, how smug this rescued, comfortable world! Something of his distaste attached itself even to Mrs. Baldwin when she next appeared. Something irritating him in her peacefulness. She, too, had seen nothing and lost nothing. But, at all events, she would n't, he knew that, take any stand on the two nephews to claim her "bit." There was nothing fatuous about Mrs. Baldwin. The slight distaste still lingered, however, and he found himself wondering once or twice, during the day that passed, in spite of it, so pleasantly, whether she was n't, for all his idealizing similes, a stupid as well as a sweet woman. It was not because of filial self-effacement that she

let her father do all the talking at meals: it was simply because she had nothing to say, and the good old boy was quite right in taking his responsibility for granted. The person who could talk was the responsible person. Her mind, though so occupied, was quite singularly inactive and, he was sure, completely uncritical. She did n't find her father in the least a bore, or suspect that anybody else might find him so. She did find, Guy felt sure, satisfaction in all her occupations. He heard her laughing — a quiet little laugh — with Cathy in the kitchen; and in the afternoon, when he helped her to prick out seedlings, her attentive profile — as, after he had dug each hole, she dropped in the little plant, pressed the earth about its roots, and fixed it in its place — made him think of the profile of a child putting its dolls to bed. They planted three beautiful long rows, and Guy was quite tired by tea-time, for though they had high tea at half-past six, they were not deprived of the precious afternoon pause, taking place as it did at the unaccustomed but pleasing hour of four.

After tea she went to see some people in the village, Mr. Haseltine dozed in his chair, and Guy took a long walk.

So the days went on, and at the end of a week he was able to write to Dorothy and tell her that he was sleeping wonderfully and that Mrs. Baldwin's cottage was all that she had pictured it. By the end of the week he had even grown rather attached to Mr. Haseltine, and he enjoyed playing chess with him every evening; and sometimes they had a game in the afternoon when tea was over. The undercurrent of irritation still flowed, but he had learned to put up with the old gentleman and to

circumvent his communicativeness, and in the case of Mrs. Baldwin he more and more felt that she was the sort of person to whom one would, probably, forgive anything. It had become evident to him that what might be dulness might also be unawareness. That was a certain kind of dulness, it was true, but it did n't preclude capacity for response if the proper stimulus were applied. It amused him to note that if none of the nearly inevitable jars of shared life seemed ever to occur between her and her father, it was simply because, when a difference arose, she remained unconscious of it unless it were put before her. Nothing could have been less in the line of selfishness; it was she who thought of him, of his comfort and happiness, and who ordered her life to further them; he, in this respect, was passive; but Guy felt that the poor old boy often brooded in some disconsolateness over small trials and perplexities that a companion more alert to symptoms would have discerned and dispelled at once. Mr. Haseltine even, sometimes, confided such grievances to the P.G.

"I don't want to bother Effie about it," he said; — E. had stood for Effie — "she's a dreamy creature and very forgetful. But it's quite evident to me that the rector and his wife have been expecting to be asked to tea to meet you. I've just been talking to them in the lane, and I saw it plainly. They had asked us to bring you before you arrived, hearing we were to have another guest, — they've always been most kind and neighbourly in helping us to entertain our new friends, — and I really don't know why Effie should have got out of it. I usually have to remind her, it's true. But I sometimes get tired of always having to. She does n't

care for them herself; but that's no reason why you might not. We have few enough interests to offer visitors."

Guy was glad to have escaped the rectory tea, though he did not say this in assuring Mr. Haseltine that the entertainment offered at Thatches was absolutely to his taste. He was completely out of place at any rectory; he could imagine no rector who would not find his poems pernicious; but he felt that there was justice in Mr. Haseltine's contention. He *might* have cared for them. As it was, Mr. Haseltine was brought once again to reminding her. It was evident then that she was ready to please anybody or everybody.

"Ask them? Ought I to ask them?"

"My dear, it's ten days since they sent their invitation. They spoke again — and it's the second time — of having been so sorry not to see us, when I met them yesterday, in the lane. I don't know why you did not go."

"I thought it would bore Mr. Norris, father. He came here for quiet, you know. But would it bore you?" she asked Guy. "They are very nice. I don't mean that."

"It's certainly very pleasant being quiet," said Guy; "but if Mr. Haseltine likes having them, I assure you that people don't frighten me in the least."

"Oh, not on my account," Mr. Haseltine protested. "I see our good friends continually. It is of them I am thinking, as well as of Mr. Norris. He might find them more interesting than you do, Effie, and they will, I fear, be hurt."

Now that it was put before her, Mrs. Baldwin did it every justice, rising from the breakfast-table,

where she had just finished, to go to her desk, and murmuring as she went, "I had n't thought of that. They might be hurt. So, if it *won't* bore you, Mr. Norris."

And the Laycocks were asked, and did indeed bore Guy sadly.

It was on the night after their visit — Mr. Laycock had questioned him earnestly about his personal impressions of the war and to evade him had been wearying — that Guy, for the first time, really, since he had come, found sleep difficult and even menaced. It was because of that, he felt sure, looking back on it, that the curious occurrence of the next day took place — curious, and, had it taken place in the presence of any one else, embarrassing. But what made it most curious was just that; he had not felt it embarrassing to break down and sob before Mrs. Baldwin.

The morning had begun badly. The breakfast-table papers had been full of the approaching victory. Mr. Haseltine read out passages from the *Times* as he broke his toast and drank his coffee. He had reiterated the triumph of his long conviction, and Mrs. Baldwin had murmured assent. "All's well with the world," was the suffocating assurance that seemed to breathe from them both. "All's blue." Was hell forgotten like that? What if the war were won? Of course, it had to be won — that was an unquestioned premise that had underlain his rebellions as well as Mr. Haseltine's complacencies since the beginning. But what of it? No victory could redeem what had been done.

He went out into the garden, to be away from Mr. Haseltine, as soon as he could, and took a book into the summer-house; and it was here, a little

later, that Mrs. Baldwin, seeing him as she passed, her garden-basket on her arm, paused to ask him, with her smile of the shy hostess, if he were all right. She did n't often ask him that, and he saw at once that his recent recalcitrancy to rejoicing had pierced even her vagueness. He knew that he still looked recalcitrant, and he was determined not to soften the overt opposition rising in him; so he raised his eyes to her over his book and said that he was not, perhaps, feeling very fit that morning.

Mrs. Baldwin hesitated at the entrance to the summer-house. She looked behind her at the garden and up at the roses clustering over the lintel under the thatch; she even took out her scissors, in the uncertainty that, evidently, beset her, and snipped off a dead rose, and she said presently, "It was all that talk about the war, was n't it — when what you must ask is to forget it."

"Oh, I don't ask that at all," said Guy. "I should scorn myself for forgetting it." She glanced in again at him, mildly. "I want to forget what's irrelevant, like victory," he said; "but not what is relevant, like irremediable wrong."

Her awareness had not, of course, gone nearly as far as this. She kept her eyes on him, and he was glad to feel that he could probably shock her. "You see," he found himself saying, "I saw the wrong. I saw the war — at the closest quarters."

"Yes — oh, yes," Mrs. Baldwin murmured.

"For me, tragedy does n't cease to exist when it's shovelled underground. If one goes down into hell, one does n't want to forget the fact — though one may hope to forget the torments and horrors; one wants, rather, to remember that hell exists — and to try and square life with that actuality."

There was silence after this for a moment, and he imagined that she was very much at a loss. Her next words seemed indeed to express nothing so much as her failure to follow — that and a silliness really rather adorable, had he been in a mood to find it anything but exasperating. "But, still — hell does n't exist, does it?" she offered him for his appeasement.

Guy laughed. "Does n't it? When things like this war can happen? How could it ever have existed but in men's hearts? It's there that it smoulders and, when its moment comes, leaps out to blast the world."

He could talk to her like this because she was too simple to suspect in him a poetical attitudinizing; any one else would of course suspect it. Guy was even aware that to any one else that was what it would have been. She looked kind and troubled and as much as ever at a loss. She did n't know at all how to deal with the patient, and she was evidently uncertain what to do, since it might seem heartless to go away and leave him to his black thoughts, yet intrudingly intimate to come and sit down beside him. Nothing could be less intimate than Mrs. Baldwin. It was he, of course, who was tasteless in talking to her in a vein appropriate only to intimacy.

"Don't bother over me," he said, offering her the patent artifice of a smile. "I'm simply a bad case. You must n't let me trouble you. You must just turn your back on me when I'm like this."

It was not poetic attitudinizing now; there was in his voice a quaver of grief and she responded to it at once.

"Oh, but I don't like to do that. I do wish I

could be of some help. I see you have n't slept, for you look so tired, as you did when you first came. And Mr. Laycock did bore you. It's wrong of people to talk to you about the war."

For the first time he saw in the eyes fixed upon him, pity, evident pity and solicitude. And before it he felt himself crumble suddenly. He saw all the reasons she had for pitying him, did she but know. He saw Ronnie's face again; he saw his own haunted night and his own grief. He wanted her to see it. "Oh — one can't be guarded like that," he murmured; "I must try to get used to it. But — I did n't sleep; that's true. I'm so horribly afraid of not sleeping. You can't imagine what it is. I've the most awful visions." And leaning his elbows on the table, he put his hands before his face and began to cry.

She stood there; he did not hear her move at first; and then she entered and sat down on the seat beside him. But she said nothing and did not touch him. He had had in all the tumult of his disintegration, a swift passage of surmise; would she not draw his head upon her shoulder, like a mother, and comfort him? But that would have broken him down heaven knew how much further.

He cried frankly, articulating presently, "It's my nerves, you know; they have all gone to pieces. I lost my friend; my dearest friend. For months I did n't sleep."

Mrs. Baldwin's silence was not oppressive, or repressive either. He heard her hands move slightly on the basket she held on her knees and the soft chafing in the folds of her linen bodice that her breathing made. It was an accepting stillness and

it presently quieted him; more than that, it enabled him at last to lift his head and look at her without feeling ashamed of himself. Oddly enough, he knew that he, perhaps, ought to be. He *could* have helped himself. There had been an element of wilfulness in his breakdown; he had wanted her to see; but, even had she known this about him, he would not have felt ashamed. She was so curiously a person with whom one could not associate blames and judgments. She was an accepting person.

She was n't looking at him, but out at the sweet, bright, autumnal little garden; and as her eyes came to him, he felt them full of thought; felt, for the first time, sure that, whatever she might be, she was not dull.

He could not remember, looking back at the little scene, that she had said a single further word. He did not think that he had said anything further. He was helping her, a little while after, to prune the Aimée Vibert rose that had grown with great unruliness over the little tool-house near the kitchen door. "It will really pull it down unless we cut out some of these great branches," she had said, as, equipped with stout gloves, they had worked away together, unfastening the tangled trails and stretching them out on the ground. So displayed, the Aimée Vibert was drastically dealt with, and it was midday before they finished fastening the thinned and shortened shoots into place.

She had said nothing further; but he believed that, for the first time, her thought really included him. He had been put before her. She was different afterwards. He had become an individual to her, and had ceased to be merely the paying guest.

IV

THE third week came. There was rain, rather sad September rain, for a day or two. They sat in the evenings before the wide fireplace where logs blazed. Mrs. Baldwin, at his suggestion, read aloud to them Fabre's *Souvenirs Entomologiques*. She read French prettily, better than he did himself, and he was a little chagrined once or twice to find that she knew it better, priding himself on his French as he did. He had lived for a year in Paris, with Ronnie, before the war.

The horrors of the grim, complicated underworld revealed by the French seer distressed him. Mrs. Baldwin did not feel them as he did, feeling the marvels rather than the horrors, perhaps. She laughed a little, rather callously, at the ladies who devoured their husbands, and seemed pleased by the odious forethought of the egg-laying mothers. She shared Fabre's humorous dispassionateness, if not the fond partiality which, while it made him the more charming, did n't, Guy insisted, make his horrid wasps and beetles a bit more so. As usual, she vexed him a little, even while, more and more, he felt her intelligent; perhaps she vexed him all the more for that.

"She's so devilishly contented with the world," he said to himself sometimes, even while he smiled, remembering her laughter.

Old Mr. Haseltine fell asleep one night while she read, and to be together there before the fire, the old man sleeping beside them, made them nearer than they had ever been before. Guy was aware of this nearness while he listened and while he

watched her hand, short, like a child's (and her face was so short) support the book, and her eyelashes dropping down the page or raised to a fresh one.

When he went to his room that night, he stood still for a long time, his candle in his hand, listening to the soft beat of the rain against the window. He was hardly ever now afraid of being alone, or of the dark, and he stood there musing and listening, while he still seemed to see Mrs. Baldwin's hand as it held the book, and her reading profile. Her life seemed to breathe upon him and he rested in it. He slept deliciously.

"Did you know that I write?" he asked her next day. He had wondered about this once or twice before.

"Oh, yes; your cousin, in her letter, you know, told me that you wrote," said Mrs. Baldwin.

They were in the living-room after midday dinner, and alone. She looked up at him very kindly from the papers and letters she was sorting at her desk.

"You've never heard of my effusions otherwise, though?" He put on a rueful air. "Such is fame!"

"Are you famous?" Her smile was a little troubled. "I don't follow things, you know, living here as I do."

"You read the papers. I *have* had reviews: good ones."

"I don't read them very regularly," she admitted. "And I so often don't remember the names of people in reviews, even when I've liked what is said of them. Have you any of your poems here? Perhaps you'll let me read them."

He felt, with the familiar chagrin, that she would never, of herself, have thought of asking him.

"Yes, my last volume. It's just out."

He was going for a walk in the rain with Mr. Haseltine that afternoon. There was an old church in the neighbouring village that his friend wanted him to see. Mrs. Baldwin had letters to write. "Will you have time to look at it while we are out?" he asked.

Although she had shown so little interest in him, he was eager, pathetically so, he felt, that she should read and care about his poems. She said that it was just the time: her letters would not take long. And so he ran up to his room and got the little book for her: *Burnt Offerings.*

All the time that he was walking with Mr. Haseltine and seeing the church, and the old manor house that took them a half mile further, he wondered what she was thinking about his poems.

By the time they had returned the rain had ceased. A warm September sunlight diffused itself. Veils lifted from the stream and trailed upon the lower meadows. The sky grew clear and the leaves all sparkled. They found that Mrs. Baldwin had had her cup of tea, for it was past four; but all had been left in readiness for them, the kettle boiling; and after Guy had swallowed his, he went out and saw her walking down among the crocuses.

"Oh, you are back?" she said when he joined her. "I wanted to be there to give you your tea. Was it all right?"

"Perfectly," he said. "We put in just your number of spoonfuls."

Mrs. Baldwin wore her little knitted jacket and had put on her white, rubber-soled canvas shoes against the wet; but her head, with its thick, close braids, was bare to the sunlight.

"I had to come out as soon as it stopped raining," she said; "and I'm afraid I simply forgot to look out for you and father."

Her gentleness had always seemed contentment; this afternoon it seemed happiness, and he had never seen her look so young. He wondered if she were going to take him so dreadfully aback as not even to mention his poems; if she had simply forgotten them, too. Already her demeanour, unclouded, almost radiant, inflicted a wound; she had either forgotten, or she had cared little indeed, since she could look like that. But, after he had commented, consentingly, on the lovely hour, she went on with a change of tone, a voice a little shy, "I've read the poems. Thank you so much for letting me see them."

"You read all of them?"

"Yes. I did n't write my letters."

"I hope you read them, then, because you cared for them."

She did n't answer for a moment, walking along and placing the small white feet carefully among the crocuses. "They are very sad," she then said.

He was aware, after an instant of adjustment to the blow, that she made him very angry. Terrible, his poems, searing, scorching; wicked, if one would; but not sad.

"Oh!" he murmured; and he wondered if the divided feeling she had from the first roused in him had been this hatred, not perhaps of her, but of her unvarying acquiescence, her untroubled inadequacy.

"They interested me very much," she said, feeling, no doubt, that, whatever he was, he was not pleased. "They made me see, I mean, all the things you have been through."

"Sad things, you call them. You know, I rather feel as if I'd heard you call hell sad."

She looked up at him quickly, and it was now she who was taken aback and, as she had been the other day, at a loss. And, as on the other day, she found the same answer, though she offered it deprecatingly, feeling his displeasure. "But hell does n't exist."

"Don't you think anything horrible exists?"

They turned at the end of the meadow. It seemed to him, although he felt as if he hated her, that they were suddenly intimate in their antagonism. He would force that antagonism, and its intimacy, upon her — to its last implication.

"Horrible? Oh, yes, yes!" she said, startled, and that was, he reflected grimly, to the good. "But it would have to be irretrievable, would n't it, to be hell?" she urged.

"Do you suggest that it's not irretrievable? You own it's horrible. Irretrievably horrible, I call it. And that's what I call hell. Yet all that you can find to say of my poems is that they are sad."

She hesitated, feeling her way, hearing in the recurrent word how it had rankled. "I meant sad, I think, because of you; because you had suffered so much."

"You seem always to imply that one might *not* have suffered!" And thrusting aside her quickly murmured, "Oh, no, no!" he went on: "I can't understand your attitude of mind. Do you realize at all, I sometimes wonder, what it has all meant, this nightmare we are living in — we, that is, to whom it came? Can you imagine what it was to me to see boys, dead boys, buried stealthily, at night, under fire? Boys so mangled, so disfigured — you

read that poem, 'Half a Corpse'? — that their mothers would n't have known them; featureless, dismembered boys, heaped one upon the other in the mud. Has your mind ever dwelt upon the community of corruption in which they lie, as their mothers' minds must dwell? I do not understand you. I do not understand how you can dare to call such things sad."

His own wrath shook and yet sustained him, though he knew a fear lest he had gone too far; but in her silence — they had reached the other end of the meadow and turned again in their walk — he felt that there was no resentment. It was as if she realized that those who have returned from hell cannot be asked to stop and pick their words with courtesy, and accepted his vehemence, if not his blame; and again, when she spoke at last, he felt that her bewilderment had settled into thought.

"Yes, I can imagine," she said. "But no, I don't think that my mind has dwelt on those things. If I were their mothers, I don't think that my mind would dwell, as you say. Something would burn through. There are other kinds of suffering — better kinds; they help, I believe. And, for that kind, it is worse, but is it so much worse than in ordinary life? That is what happens all the time when there is no war; dreadful changes in the dead; and burials. They are not quite so near each other in a churchyard, and their graves are named; but do you think that makes it easier to bear?"

He felt now as if it were insult she was offering him.

"You deny all tragedy to war, then? It's all to you on a level with an Elegy in a Country Churchyard, with curfew and rector and primrose-wreaths?

You read 'His Eyes,'" — Guy's voice had a hoarser note, but, mingled with the sincerity of what, at last, he knew he was to tell her, the very centre of his sick heart, went a surface appreciation of what he had just said and of how curfew and rector and primrose-wreaths would go into a bitter poem one day, — "you read that poem of mine at the end of the book. 'His Eyes' is about myself and my friend Ronnie Barlow, the artist; you never heard of him, I know. He hung, with shattered legs, dying, just in front of us, on the barbed wire, for three days and nights. When he could speak, it was to beg to be shot. We tried to get to him, four, five times; it was no good. There was barbed wire between, and the Germans spotted us every time. He died during the third night, and next morning I found him looking at me — as he had looked during these three days — his torment and his reproach. And so he went on looking until the rats came and he had no more eyes to look with. Will you tell me that that is no worse than the deaths died in the parishes of England? Will you tell me that it's the sort of death died by the cheery, mature gentlemen who ate their dinners and slept warm and dropped a tear — while they did their 'bit' in their Government offices — over the brave lads saving England?"

He had taken refuge from Ronnie in hatred of those whom, in the poem, he called his murderers, and his voice was weighted with its fierce indictment. In the pause that followed he had time to wonder if she found him, at last, intolerable. She walked beside him, still looking down, and it might well have been in a chill withdrawal. He almost expected to hear her, in another moment, find the

conventional phrase with which to leave him. But no, — and in his own long sigh he recognized the depth of his relief, — she was not going to punish him with convention; she was not going to leave him. And what she said at last was, "I'm so sorry! Please believe that I'm so very, very sorry! Only — why do you speak, and write, as though it were some one's fault?"

Ah, here then, at last, they had come to it, the barrier, on one side of which he stood with his hell and she on the other in her artificial paradise.

"I write it and speak it because it is the truth," he said. "Millions of innocent creatures, of gifted, beautiful creatures, like my friend, have been slaughtered, tortured, driven mad, because of greasy, greedy wire-pullers in their leather chairs at home."

"In this war, too?"

"In this war preëminently."

"You don't feel that the crime was Germany's?"

"Oh, of course!" his laugh sneered the facile acquiescence. "Let us put it on Germany, by all means. We'll sleep the sounder! Certainly, I grant it to you freely — Germany struck the match and lighted the fuse."

"And were n't we all responsible for the fuse — you and I, I mean, as much as the people in the leather chairs?" There was no irony in her repetition. "The people who fought, as much as the people who did n't fight? Was n't the fuse simply our conception of our national safety? of our national honour? That is what I feel so sad about your poems, — though I should never have wanted to explain it, — that you are so wrong, so ungenerous, so vindictive."

In all his life it had rarely been his lot to know such astonishment. Astonishment came first; and then the deep, deep hurt that rose, wave after wave, within him. Was this, then, what she felt for him — only this? Had n't he told her about Ronnie — her alone of all the world? Should not that have made her reverent of him, and pitiful? Should a man who had endured such griefs receive such blows? Waves of colour, too, flooded his face and tears rushed to his eyes. He thought, when he was able at last to gather thoughts together, that it should now be for him to find the conventional phrase and leave her. But, glancing again at her profile, finding it, though singularly pale, so much more gentle than severe, the impulse dropped. He was not strong enough for convention. He was shaken, shattered; too weak even for self-preservation.

He walked, miserable, and his mind full of a whirling darkness, beside her, determining only that she should be the first to speak again. She was. She had quite come out of her shyness, — if it had ever been that, — and though it was with something faltering, something that was, he made out, sorry for them both in the predicament to which, after all, he, and not she, had brought them, it was more than all with resolution that she said, —

"I am so sorry if I seem presumptuous. But you asked me. And your poems are n't the first I've read. So many young men, who have been so brave, like you, and who have been through it all so that they have the right to speak, seem to feel more than anything that hatred, not against war, — we all hate war, — but against people, some

groups of people, they make responsible. There are bad and selfish people everywhere, — among poets, I feel sure, just as much as among statesmen; but has n't this war proved — since everybody has gone — that no one group is bad and selfish; that there are men in every group who have been glad to die for their country? I know I have no weight with young men like you; I am not a person of any importance for opinion; but how I wish that I could make you believe that you ought not to write like that — with hatred in your heart. Can great poetry be written out of hatred? And it's not only yourself it hurts: it hurts other people; harms them, I mean. It spreads a mood of darkness and fever just when they are so in need of light and calm. And for the mothers, for people who have lost, cruelly, those whom they loved as much, perhaps even more, than you loved your friend — do you not see how your poems must sicken them? Do you not see that it all becomes just that — a community of corruption? You imprison them, force them back into their helpless suffering; when what they pray for is strength to rise above it and to feel all the goodness and love that has been given for them; to feel what is beautiful, not what is horrible; so as to be worthy of their dead."

As he listened to her, — and with a slow revulsion of all his nature, as if, against his very will and mind, she moved his heart to breaking with something passionate that spoke in her words, — an overwhelming experience befell him.

The crocuses beneath their feet, her sunlit shape beside him, her voice, as she spoke to him thus, with her very soul, blended together in a rising wave of light, or music, piercing, sweeping him,

lifting him up to some new capacity, leaving the old inert and dangling, lifting and still lifting him, until at last, as if with a great, emerging breath, he came into a region bright and fair, whence, looking down on the dark and tattered past, he saw all life differently, even Ronnie's death, even Ronnie's eyes. Ronnie was with him, with Mrs. Baldwin, in the bright stillness.

Upborne, sustained, like a swimmer in some strange, new element, he seemed to gaze down through its golden spaces at the inert, alien darkness that had been himself. "Rubbish! Rubbish!" he seemed to hear himself say. Yet all was not left behind; all was not rubbish; else how could he be here, with her, with Ronnie? It was bliss to see himself as he had been, since something else was so immeasurably secure. Oh — could one stay always like this! This was to taste of everlasting life. His longing, as if with a cry, a grasp from the swimmer, marked the soft turning of the tide. He sank, but it was sweetly, if with a strange, an infinite sadness, a sadness recorded, accepted, while he sank, as making forever the portion of the temporal consciousness. And the bliss still stayed in the acceptance, and purple ripples seemed to glide back rhythmically as the crocuses swam before his eyes. It had all been only an instant then, for her last words came to him as if she had but spoken them and he heard his own voice murmuring, as if from very far away, "Perhaps you are right."

The ripples stayed themselves. He looked down at the crocuses and saw Mrs. Baldwin's white shoes standing still among them. Lifting his eyes, which felt heavy, he found her looking at him with attention, with anxiety.

"It's nothing," he tried to smile. "Nothing at all. I mean — you've done me good." He saw that she had n't an idea of how she had done it.

"Do take my arm," she said. "I ought to have remembered that you are not strong yet."

He took her arm. Perhaps he needed it. His normal consciousness was gathering about him once again, but no longer with the old close texture. It was all more permeable to light — that was how he tried to put it. And he heard his voice go on, "You see — what it all amounts to — oh, I'm not thinking about the poems, I know that you must be right — it's not what you say, is it? It's something far more right than what you say. But I love you. That's why you can do it to me. I wonder I did n't see it before. You made me angry with your peacefulness. I did n't understand. I needed your peace. You, you were what I needed. You will forgive my speaking? Surely you'll understand. Perhaps you feel you hardly know me, while you are like my life. Is it possible that some day you might love me back and marry me?"

He had used the words that came. They were the words of the normal consciousness. How else could he ask her to keep him always near her so that he might never lose that sense of paradise?

But she had stopped still and had drawn her arm from his. Was it possible that after what she had done to him, for him, she could see him only thus? "Oh, no," she said. "No. No." Never had he seen a human face express with such ineffable gentleness such repudiation. And she repeated it, as if he had given her too much to bear; as if for her own reassurance; as if to efface even the mem-

ory of his words: "No; no; no!" She began again to walk towards the house.

Had it not been for the initiation that had passed he knew so clearly now, in all unawareness from her spirit to his, he would have felt to the full the shame of his rejection, the deserved shame. For he was a stranger and she had given him no right to believe that she even liked him. But he could feel no shame. Had he really thought that she could love him? Had it not been only that he wanted to tell her that he loved her, and had wanted her, as it were, to keep him safe? He found himself trying to explain this to her, — not pleading, — only so that she should not be angry. "I had to tell you. You'd done me so much good. Everything came different. Really, I'm not so presumptuous. I never meant to ask anything."

But she was not angry. "Forgive me," she said. "I hardly know what I am saying. You so astonished me. Forgive me. But I don't feel as if I knew you at all. Please don't think me reproaching you. I begin to understand. You are not at all strong. It was like the other day when you cried, I mean — I feel sure you think you care for me; but you could n't have said it, when we know each other so little, if you had been well."

She was putting it aside, for his sake, as an aberration, and he really smiled a little as he shook his head. "No; really, really, it's not that; not because I've been on edge and ill. It was something that came to me from what you are; something that's been coming ever since I saw you. I know that I am nothing to you; but for a moment, just now, it seemed, when I had received so much, that you must know what you had given; it seemed that

a person to whom so much could be given, could not be so far away. But even then I saw quite clearly what you saw in me; a vain, pretentious, emotional creature; insincere, too, and proud of my suffering. I *am* that. But I had never seen it before. And when it came to me from you and, instead of crushing me, lifted me up, I knew that I loved you. — No; I won't try to explain. Only you do forgive me? You will let me go on as if it had n't happened? I promise you that I'll never trouble you again."

Oh, the gentleness, the heavenly gentleness! It breathed through him like the colour of the crocuses, although she was as impersonal, as untouched, and as mysterious as they. He was nothing to her — nothing; but she stood before him, looking at him, and though she gave nothing but the gentleness, he knew that he received all that he needed. It was enough that she was there.

"But it's *I* to be forgiven — *I*," she repeated. "Of course we will go on. Oh, you look very tired. Please take my arm again. I spoke so strangely to you. But — but —" She had flushed: for the first time he saw the colour darken her face as if with a veil of pain, and in her voice was the passion, deeper, stiller, that he had heard a little while ago and that had enfranchised him. "I am married — I mean, my husband is dead, but I am married. Perhaps you don't understand. Perhaps you will some day, if you should lose some one you love and feel them still your very life. We were like that. He is always with me."

They had said nothing more as they walked up the meadow to the house, his arm in hers. He had

no sense of loss; rather, from her last words to him, came a sense of further gain. She would be like that. He saw now that her peace, against which he had pressed and protested, was something won, was depth, not emptiness. She, too, had lost and suffered. She was made dearer to him, more sacred. As for his love, it did not belong — he had seen this even before she told him why — to this everyday world to which he had returned. But it was everything to have found it, with that other world, and to know that there it had its being, its reality, forever. What was it that had enlarged, transformed his life, but that very certitude of an eternity where all good was secure? He could not explain it to himself in any words. Words were the keys of temporality. But he had seen, if only for the few shining moments, that Ronnie was not lost; that nothing had been in vain.

If he found no difficulty, it was evident to him that Mrs. Baldwin felt none, and he was glad to believe that this might be because he showed her so completely, in his candid contentment, that he would never trouble her again. She was not more kind to him; but she took, perhaps, even more care, as if feeling that she had miscalculated something in his recovery. She inaugurated a glass of hot milk, instead of spiced hot water, at bedtime, and a rest on the sofa, with a rug, before the midday dinner. "You will look so much better when you go back than when you came," she said.

For the time of going back drew near, and he did not dread it, though loving Thatches and all it meant more and more with every day. But of course, even in the temporal world, he was not to lose Thatches. That was quite understood between

them. The P.G. would be welcome whenever he cared to come.

V

He was playing chess on the afternoon before his departure. Tea was over and Mrs. Baldwin had gone out. Guy had noticed that she had been perhaps a little stiller than usual that day, when he had seen her, and that he had seen her little. The game did not go very well; they were neither of them keen on it; and when the old gentleman had won an easy victory, he leaned back in his chair, the board still on its little table between them, and said, "Poor Effie! She's still in the church, or in the churchyard, I expect."

Guy felt the shock of a great surprise. Strangely enough, though Mrs. Baldwin had spoken of her husband and of his death, and though his books were there, he did not associate him with Thatches, nor with the churchyard. And with the word, "churchyard," a painful anxiety rose in him.

"Is it an anniversary?" he asked.

"Yes," Mr. Haseltine nodded, sighing and rubbing his hand over his head. "September twenty-ninth. I'd forgotten myself till just a little while ago. Oliver died on this day. Her husband. Poor Effie!"

"They lived here?" Guy asked. He had imagined that it had been after her bereavement that she and her father had found and made a home of Thatches.

"Oh, yes. They lived here. All their married life," said Mr. Haseltine. "Ten years or so. It was a great love-match. They were very happy. I never saw a happier couple — until the end."

"Did anything part them?"

Mr. Haseltine had put his hands into his pockets and was gazing at the board as if with a painful concentration, and though he shook his head he answered, "It was the malady. Cancer, you know. Cancer of the face. Such a handsome fellow, too: beautiful, bright, smiling eyes; beautiful mouth. All gone. All disfigured, cruelly disfigured, and with horrible suffering."

Guy felt his breath coming thickly. "Was it long?" he asked.

"Yes. Long. Eighteen months, I think. Morphia did little good at last. He could n't swallow; could hardly speak; begged to be killed and put out of his torment. She was with him in it all. She never left him, day or night; nor could he have borne it if she had. Nothing quieted him except her hand in his. But at the end," said Mr. Haseltine, pushing away the table and rising, "at the end, it attacked his brain and then he raved at her. She could n't go into the room at the last."

The old man, with step lagging, as if weighted, walked away to the window and stood looking out, while Guy, at the table, felt his heart turn to stone.

"Poor Effie!" Mr. Haseltine repeated after a little while. He came back into the room and moved up and down, pausing to look at the books and pictures. "She has never been the same since. For a long while we were afraid she could n't live. She hardly slept for months; and when she did sleep, she used to wake crying, crying, always for him. When she became stronger, she used to walk up and down those meadows, sometimes for hours at a time. Very gentle; no complaint; always ready to talk to people, to go on with things as best she

could; but changed; completely changed. We speak very little of him; but when we do, it's quite naturally. She goes to the church sometimes, and there are always flowers on his grave; but I don't think she has any orthodox beliefs; I don't know that she has any beliefs at all. Still, she seems helped. She is a very dear, unselfish woman; a dreamer, she was always a dreamer; but always meaning well; and she does good in her quiet way. And I think she likes this plan of having people come and stay and seeing after them; especially now that they are so often people who have had a bad time. Dear me, dear me!" Mr. Haseltine again shook his head, stationed again at the window and looking out. "You would hardly have recognized her had you seen her ten years ago. She had bright hair and a charming colour; and full of gaiety and mischief. You'd hardly believe it now."

"I'm so sorry," Guy heard himself saying. He remembered that those were the words Mrs. Baldwin had used to him about Ronnie.

"Yes, it's very sad," said Mr. Haseltine. "Life is certainly very difficult for some of us, and Effie has had her share. Somehow one does n't remember it when one is with her. I only recalled the day by chance."

Guy was walking in the meadows when Mrs. Baldwin returned. He saw her in the garden, reading the letters that the evening post had brought, and his first impulse was to remove himself as speedily as might be from her sight, to cross the bridge and the farther meadow, and turn into the lane that led away from it. But then he saw, as he stood irresolute, that she was coming down to him, and he stood there, helpless, watching her

approach in the soft radiance of the late afternoon. She wore one of the lavender-coloured dresses and the little knitted jacket. In her hand were the opened letters. Her face was tranquil. She was, of course, unaware of what had happened to him.

She joined him. "You are having your last look at the crocuses?"

It was their last look together. That, of course, was why she had come, full of care and of kindness.

"Yes. Yes. My last look for the year." He heard that his voice was strange. And his heart seemed to lie like a cold hard block in his side.

"Are n't you feeling well?" she asked.

He walked beside her in silence. What could he say? But how was it possible not to tell her?

They had turned towards the sunset and came now to the bridge. She was looking at him, with solicitude. He stopped before they crossed.

"I must say something to you," broke from him. "I must. I can't go away without your knowing — my shame — my unutterable remorse."

She looked at him with the look he knew so well. Kindly, firmly, if with anxiety, she prepared to hear him thrust some new torment upon her.

"Shame? Remorse?" she murmured.

"About my poems. About my griefs. What I've said to you. What I've given you to bear. I thought I'd borne so much. I thought you unfeeling, without experience. I thought I'd been set apart — that all of us had been set apart, who suffered in the war. Stop me at once if you won't hear it from me. But your father told me, just now, about your husband's death."

She became very pale. She looked away from him, but she said nothing.

"That's all," said Guy after a long silence. He saw that there was nothing more to tell her. She had understood.

"Let us walk up and down," said Mrs. Baldwin.

They crossed the bridge. He saw the stream sliding brightly below them between the old, black planks. In the farther meadows the crocuses grew more thickly and opened widely their pale purple chalices.

"We have all suffered," said Mrs. Baldwin. "You must n't have remorse or shame. Nothing is harmed between us."

The horrible stricture around his heart relaxed, and as they went very slowly up and down he felt his throat tighten and tears rising, rising to his eyes. He could not keep them back. He was n't really quite strong enough for this. They fell and fell, and from time to time he put up his hand to brush them away.

"We have all suffered," Mrs. Baldwin repeated gently.

"Some, more! some, more!" he said brokenly. "Some, most of all!"

They came back to the bridge, but though they crossed over, they did not pass out through the high gate that barred the other end. The gate was closed, and Guy stopped at it and leaned on it and put his face on his hands. Mrs. Baldwin stood at the gatepost beside him, her hand holding it and her head leaned against her hand.

"He would have liked you," she said. "He was so interested in young men, young poets. He was not old himself; and he wrote, too, did you know? All those books in the living-room are his. He used to work there. I will give you his two books if you

care to have them. They were thought very good; I think you will like them. — It was because of the crocuses we came here," she went on. "We found them one September, just like this, and the three little ruined cottages, and we knew at once that we must live here. He so loved them. When he was very ill — but before the very end when nothing could come to him any longer, when he was quite shut away — he used to lie at the window and look out at them — that big window above the living-room."

Divinely she was helping him. It was as if, taking him by the hand, she led him again away from his darkness and into her own light.

Yes, brokenly it came to him, it was there, secure; how won, he knew not. Through her he had found it; but that was because her feet had passed before him up the calvary. She had gone through everything; and she knew everything.

And, to his new hearing, something of the infinite weariness of that ascent was in her voice when she next spoke, although it was a voice as peaceful as the evening air around them. "Are they not beautiful?" she said.

He raised his head and looked at the flowers through his tears. They had never been so beautiful. "They make me think of you," he told her.

"Do they?" Mrs. Baldwin still leaned her head against her hand, still looked out over the meadows. "But there are so many of them," she said. "So many. That is what I feel first of all about them. I could not think of them as like one person. Multitudes. Multitudes. — And so silent! They make me think always of the souls of the happy dead."

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